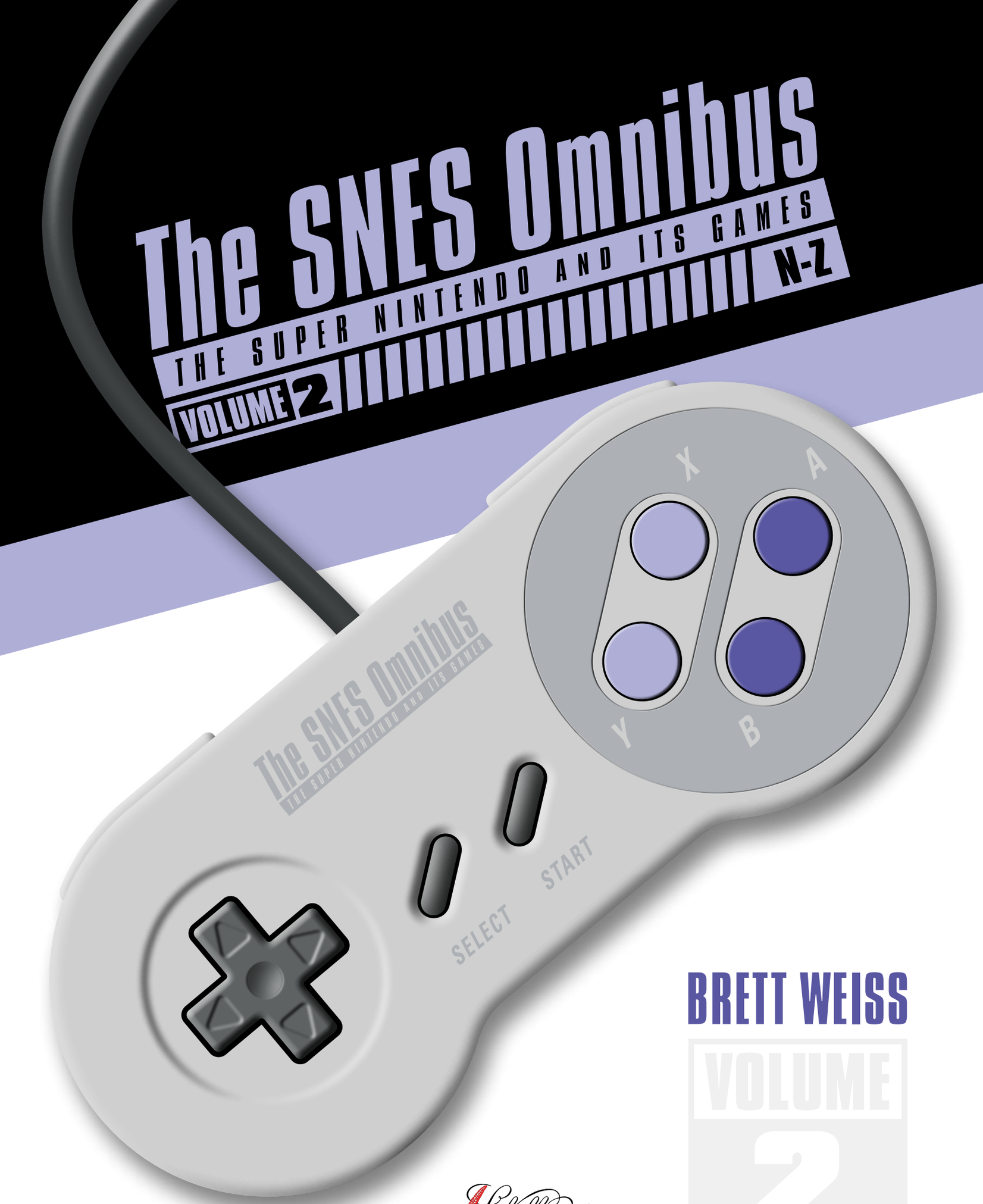
The SNES Omnibus

THE SUPER NINTENDO AND ITS GAMES

VOLUME 2



BRETT WEISS

VOLUME 2

Schiffer Publishing Ltd.
4880 Lower Valley Road • Atglen, PA 19310

Other Schiffer Books by the Author:
The 100 Greatest Console Video Games: 1977–1987, ISBN: 978-0-7643-4618-7, $34.99

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2018955588

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Designed by Molly Shields
Cover design by Justin Watkinson
Type set in Compacta Bd BT/Times New Roman

ISBN: 978-0-7643-5725-1
Printed in China

Published by Schiffer Publishing, Ltd.
4880 Lower Valley Road
Atglen, PA 19310
Phone: (610) 593-1777; Fax: (610) 593-2002
E-mail: Info@schifferbooks.com
Web: www.schifferbooks.com

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This book is dedicated to everyone who enjoys reading about video games, to everyone who wants to know more about the games they are playing, and to each person who contributed stories to the SNES Omnibus project.

This book is also dedicated to my lovely and loving wife, Charis Weiss, who plans my trips to video game conventions, edits my work as needed, helps me when computer conundrums arise, and most importantly, stays faithful to our family during the good times and bad. Also to Ryan and Katie Weiss, my adult children, who make me proud every single day.

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FOREWORD

BY Ben Reeves

Nintendo once saved the home video game industry. It is easy to forget about those days, but electronic games were once considered a fad. When the console market crashed in 1983—due in large part to a glut of bad games—many believed that the video game craze was over. Then Nintendo came along with its Nintendo Entertainment System, and not only revived the console industry, but inspired millions of players around the country.

By the early '90s, Nintendo's chokehold on the industry started to slip. More powerful 16-bit consoles like the Sega Genesis and the TurboGrafx-16 began to challenge Nintendo's 8-bit dominance. Nintendo needed to answer this challenge to their throne.

Nintendo's response to its competitors is chronicled in the pages of the book you are holding in your hands (and its companion first volume): a piece of gaming hardware and an amazing library of games that brought joy to denizens of countless living rooms across the country. Nintendo knew that the only thing it needed to do to silence its naysayers was release a series of must-play games you could not find on other consoles, and the SNES library—which would not have been possible without Nintendo's "next-gen" NES—remains one of the best to this day.

Oddly enough, the SNES was surprisingly underpowered. Nintendo's engineering team centered the SNES architecture on a custom-built 3.58-MHz CPU. Even for the day, this was not incredibly impressive. Sega's Genesis console, which released more than two years prior to the SNES, housed a faster processor. However, Nintendo designed the SNES's chipset for maximum visual and audio performance, helping disguise its lack of horsepower. So, while the Sega Genesis could only display 512 different colors on a television screen, the SNES had a color palette of more than 32,000 colors, and could display more than 128 sprites simultaneously.

The SNES also had a few unique graphical effects up its sleeve. Nintendo designed the SNES to allow for seven different graphical display modes, but only one of these modes reached widespread acclaim. Before the system's release, Nintendo's marketing department began trumpeting the graphical feats of Mode 7: a display setting that allowed developers to rotate and scale background layers in their games. This faux 3D effect—seen in games like *Super Mario Kart*, *Pilotwings*, and *Super Castlevania*—became one of the Super Nintendo's distinguishing features and helped set the console apart from its competitors.

Of course, one of the most important aspects of any console is its controller, and Nintendo's new console received a more ergonomic controller that players could hold comfortably for hours. The design of the SNES controller was inspired by the fighting game genre, which was growing in popularity in arcades at the time. Nintendo felt that it needed six button inputs on its controller to accommodate console ports for games like *Street Fighter II*. During focus testing, Nintendo discovered that players were easily confused by six face buttons. Four face buttons, tilted into a diamond shape, were much easier for thumbs to navigate, so Nintendo shifted two of the face buttons to the controller's shoulders. The SNES featured several major innovations, but this controller design—the basis for nearly every controller since—may be one of the console's biggest contributions to the industry.

In Japan, the SNES—called the Super Famicom—had a plain, square design with rounded edges. Before shipping the console overseas, Nintendo of America believed it needed to redesign the case for the western market. Nintendo's redesign was a reaction to feedback on Nintendo's previous console. The original NES was a relatively simple gray box, and Nintendo of America had received several complaints from NES owners who placed drinks or bowls of cereal on top of their consoles, only to spill liquid into the vent at the top of the unit. To prevent SNES owners from the same fate, Nintendo of America made sure that the US version of the game system had an uneven surface.

More than 1.5 million fans rushed out to pre-order the SNES before it launched, and Nintendo's initial shipments sold out in roughly two hours. The SNES's launch day became an international media circus, as thousands of people lined up in front of electronics stores, hoping to get their hands on the console. In Japan, the Super Famicom—released November 21, 1990—had been such a hot commodity that the consoles were reportedly shipped to stores secretly and under the cover of night, for fear that the Yakuza might rob retailers.

The fervor over Nintendo's new game system was surprising to some in light of the fact that it only had two launch titles in Japan: *F-Zero* and *Super Mario World*. For the US release the following year (August 23, 1991, to be precise), Nintendo added the amateur flight simulator *Pilotwings* to that lineup. Three games might seem paltry, but Shigeru Miyamoto and his team of designers were only

SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM

The most highly anticipated system of the year has finally arrived. The Super NES made it's first appearance in American stores late in August. Despite some early compatibility problems (the system wouldn't work on certain televisions), this unit boasts many superior features that combined make it the most advanced home system in its price range. While it has hardware scaling and rotation, the Super NES is handicapped due to its super slow processor that often creates flicker and movement problems.

There should be 18 titles available by Christmas, most of which are high quality games, as well as about 60 games planned for release next year. Most of these games are souped-up versions of 8-Bit titles, putting familiar themes in 16-Bit suits.

"The SNES will offer revamped versions of your favorite NES games"

SYSTEM SPECIFICATIONS...

Processor	65816	Colors Available	32,768	Sprite Size	64 x 64
Processor Speed	3.58 MHz	Colors On-Screen	256	# Of Games	18 ($50-$70)
Resolution	512 x 448	Maximum Sprites	128	Price	$199.99

70 EGM Buyer's Guide

given fifteen months to design and code the entire launch library from the time they saw the first machine designs.

Over the years, the Super NES amassed a library far more impressive than any of the system's technical specifications. Nintendo supported its new console with some of its most beloved games, such as *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, *Super Metroid*, and *Super Mario Kart*. Meanwhile, the world's most prolific development studios, such as Square, Capcom, and Konami, rushed to release their best games on Nintendo's new hardware. At the end of its lifespan, the Super Nintendo was still turning out graphical powerhouses like *Donkey Kong Country*, *Star Fox*, and *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island*, each of which pushed the limits of the hardware to new heights.

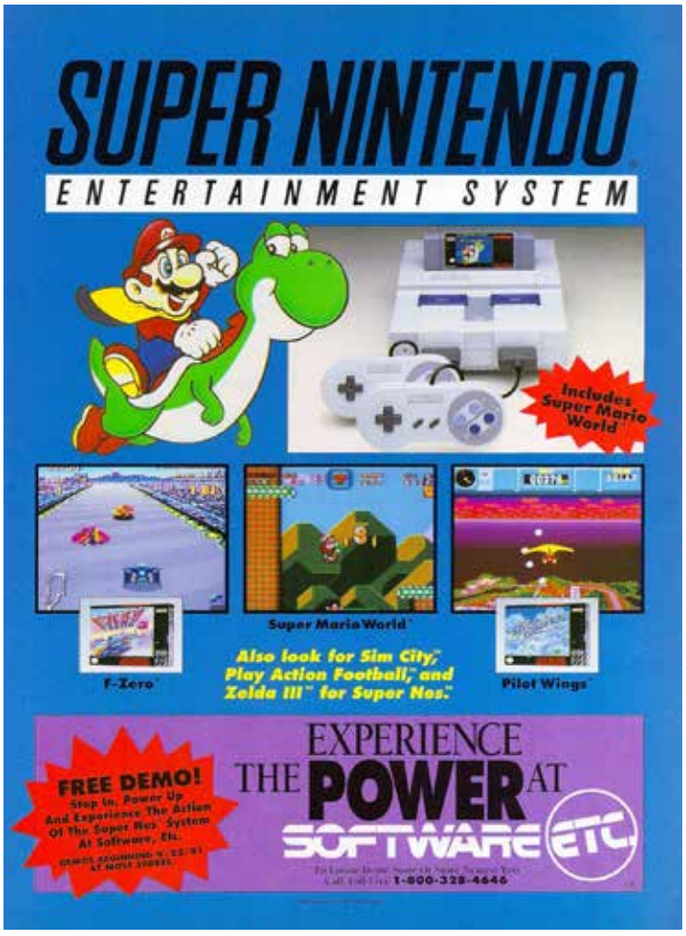
The Super Nintendo proved that Nintendo was not a one-hit wonder, and it further cemented the company's already prestigious place in the video game industry. Much of the nostalgia surrounding Nintendo's brands was built up during the SNES's lifespan, as its meager launch lineup grew into a library containing some of the most beloved games of all time.

The Super NES was never the most powerful system on the market, but Nintendo understood that developers did not need to possess the most powerful hardware to be a market leader. The Super Nintendo helped shape the industry like few consoles have before or since, and it created a foundation for our modern gaming landscape.

We all owe Nintendo a "thank you," not only for saving console gaming, but also for giving us the SNES.

We also owe a big "Thank You" to Brett Weiss and his army of contributing writers who have helped put together both volumes of the *SNES Omnibus*. These tomes have done an excellent job of preserving the legacy of the Super Nintendo and its many great games. I dare you to read on and somehow resist the urge to dust off your SNES and play all these great games yourself.

Happy gaming!
– Ben Reeves



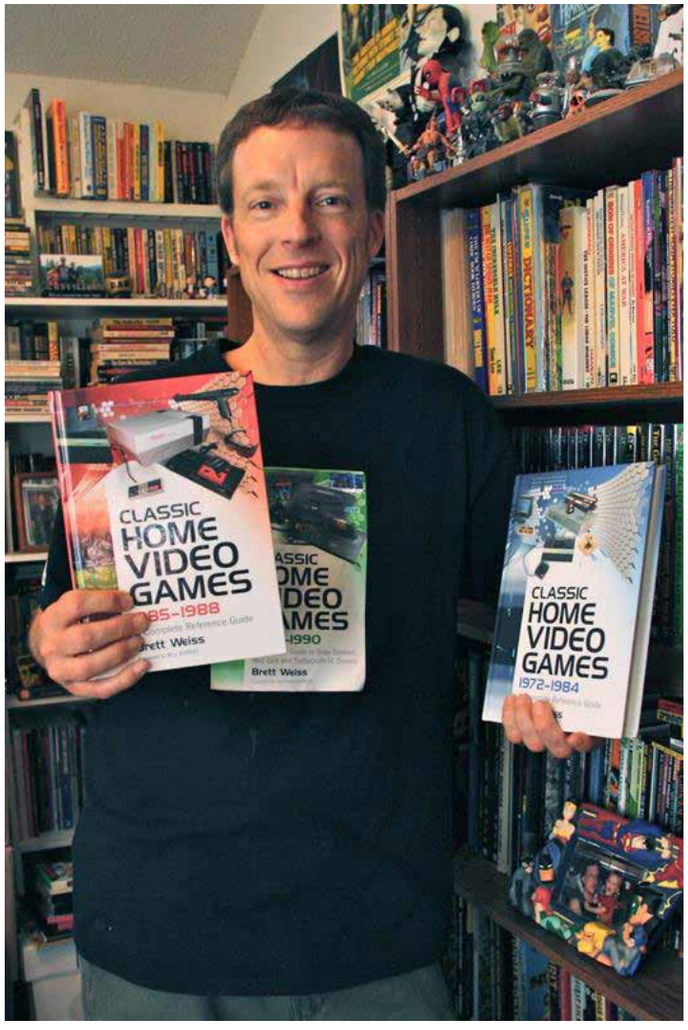
Benjamin Reeves is a writer, journalist, beer maker, and geek sponge. He is currently a senior editor for Game Informer Magazine*, and he is the author of* Kill Screen*, a gaming-related techno-thriller novel. His passions include video games, comic books, science fiction (or fact), and nearly every other thing that got you picked on in high school.*

PREFACE

Ah, the Super Nintendo. The S-N-E-S. The 16-bit workhorse. The gray—often aged to a fine yellow—and purple wonder. The excellent follow-up to the mighty NES and one of my favorite consoles of all time.

When I began writing about the Super Nintendo years ago, it was intended to be one section of the fourth and final book in my *Classic Home Video Games* series. Given the popularity of the console, and with production values soaring of late on retro gaming books (full color, hardcover, tons of photos, etc.), I decided the SNES needed more thorough coverage. So I pitched the idea of a complete book of Super Nintendo games to Schiffer Publishing, and they liked my idea.

Instead of a single book on the SNES, Schiffer's president suggested I divide it into two volumes (so each game would have at least an entire page to itself), the second of which you are holding in your hands. *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 2 (N–Z)* features write-ups for every US release for the system in the latter half of the alphabet. This means that such legendary titles as *Star Fox*, *Street Fighter II Turbo*, *Super Mario World*, *Super Metroid*, and *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* are included, along with such lesser-known games as *Obitus*, *Phalanx*, *Super Noah's Ark 3D*, and *Whizz*.



Each game, no matter how mainstream or obscure, is covered in detail, with historical data, gameplay info, reviews, quotes from other sources (such as vintage magazines), and more. The write-ups are clear, concise, and contain all the crucial information you need to know in an easily digestible format. In addition—and this is what I believe to be the best part of the book—many of the games feature nostalgic stories from video game industry insiders, including programmers, authors, magazine editors, store owners, convention promoters, YouTube® celebs, and the like.

These stories will transport you back in time to the days of renting games at Blockbuster Video, playing the Super NES with siblings and parents in front of the living room TV set, and reading dog-eared copies of such fondly remembered magazines as *GamePro*, *Nintendo Power*, and *Electronic Gaming Monthly*.

New York Times best-selling author John Jackson Miller takes a look at *Super Conflict*, while YouTuber Kelsey Lewin reveals that *Packy & Marlon* set her on a path of collecting rare, obscure, and downright weird Super Nintendo games and peripherals. Author Rusel DeMaria discusses working on SNES strategy guides, while legendary programmer David Warhol gives the lowdown on *Q*bert 3*. Warhol also reveals that Trimark Entertainment considered making a game based on the movie *Leprechaun*, but he is glad they went with *Warlock* instead.

Some stories are inspiring, while others are sad. Some will make you laugh, while others will put a lump in your throat. Some reveal new information about games that are decades old. Video games mean much more to these talented content creators and industry pros than simply pushing buttons and staring at a screen. Gaming is also about forming relationships with fellow gamers, setting and achieving goals, enjoying a bit of entertainment during the midst of a terrible time in life—the list goes on.

While soliciting the stories and during the editing process, I got to know many of the contributing writers on a more personal level, which was a nice bonus to the stellar content they submitted—this is a fine group of folks, and I am proud to call them friends and colleagues.

Taking the torch from Bill Loguidice, who wrote the foreword to *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*, *Game Informer* senior editor Ben Reeves wrote the foreword this time around and did a bang-up job. In fact, this book is a collaborative effort that I could not have written by myself. Sure, I wrote all the standard game write-ups—the play-by-play, if you will—but the contributors provided most of the color commentary. Speaking of color—everyone who contributed images for this book has my undying thanks.

Most importantly, none of this would be possible without you, constant reader and gamer. For every one of you who have bought my books, shared my posts on social media, or simply stopped by my booth at a trade show to say hello, I greatly appreciate it.

Whether you read this titanic tome from cover to cover, flip through it randomly, or look up your favorite games first, I sincerely hope you enjoy it. As with the first volume, I firmly believe you will come away from the experience knowing far more than you did about the Super Nintendo, the 1990s, and the people who played the games.

– Brett Weiss

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THE ADVENTURES OF PLOK
MANY YEARS AFTER PENKINO THE WIZARD CREATED PLOK THE FIRST, PEACE FINALLY SEEMED WITHIN REACH FOR THE LAND OF AKRILLIC.
HOW MANY TIMES MUST I TELL YOU DWEEBS? NO FIGHTING!
SLAP
Y'KNOW, PENKINO, EVEN THOSE NASTY MUTANT FLEAS RESPECT ME NOW ...BUT I'M BEAT!
OL' BUD... ISN'T IT TIME FOR SOMEONE YOUNGER TO TAKE OVER?
YOU MEAN... THAT DO-NOTHING GRANDSON OF MINE?!
YEAH! GET 'EM ARNOLD! KA-BLAM!
HUH?
OH HI, GRANDPAPPY!
KNOK
MY BOY, YOU CAN'T SPEND THE REST OF YOUR LIFE JUST WATCHING VIDEOS. IT'S TIME YOU TOOK ON SOME RESPONSIBILITY!
FLEAS!
HEY, NO PROBLEMO, GRAMPS...
I'VE BEEN PRACTICING!
PLOK
PLOK
MEANWHILE, IN THE FOUL UNDERGROUND LAIR OF THE DREADED FLEA QUEEN...
MARSHALL UND MILTON BOBBINS...
AT YOUR ZERVIZ!
YO! WOMACK SPIDER CHECKIN' IN!
ROCKY-FELLA HERE! WHERE FOOD?!
SSSS...GENTLEMEN, WE ARE PLOK'SSS GREATEST ENEMIES. SURELY, IF WE JOIN FORCES, WE CAN ELIMINATE THAT ARM-POPPING PESSST... PERMANENTLY!
HMM... ZOUNDZ ZUPER!
YO! YOU'RE OUTTA COLDCUTS!
WHO YOU CALLING SHIRLEY?!
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No non-fiction book is truly the work of just one person, and that certainly applies to *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 2 (N–Z)*.

Special thanks to everyone who contributed "insider insights," which are reviews and personal stories in the book about the SNES and its library of games written by people in the know: Martin Alessi, Dain Anderson, Dominic Arsenault, Chris Baker, Jeff Belmonte, Houston Bogus III, Jerry Bonner, Kevin Bunch, Van Burnham, Cierra Caballero, Antoinette Carey, Antoine Clerc-Renaud, Tim Colson, Michael Crisman, Nick DeMarco, Rusel DeMaria, Catherine DeSpira, Tyler Esposito, Rob Faraldi, Blair Farrell, Raymond Fix, Cliff Friedel, Keith Good, Earl Green, Jon D. Harrison, Keith Haus, Kieren Hawken, Erin Hawley, Patrick Hickey Jr., Mike Hodson, Zoe K. Howard, Kurt Kalata, Sam Kennedy, Chun Wah Kong, Russ Kumro, Anthony J. La Gambina, Ben Lancaster, Jeff Lawhead, John Lester, Kelsey Lewin, Bill Loguidice, Alex McCumbers, Stephanie Mckeon, Ryan McLelland, Delf Meek, Kale Menges, Jason Micciche, John Jackson Miller, Matt Miller, Dave Murray, Michael Nestick, Arda Ocal, Joshua L. Olson, Patrick Scott Patterson, David Paul, Eric Perez, Matt Raithel, Kris Randazzo, Benjamin Reeves, John Riggs, Dan Ryan, Scott Schreiber, Greg Sewart, Barry Shank, Holt Slack, Andy Slaven, Stephen Smith, Eric St-Cyr, Shane Stein, Rob Strangman, Michael Suitt, Darren Sulfridge, John Szczepaniak, Sarah Szefer, Paul Tesi, Michael Thomasson, Alex Thompson, Thor Thorvaldson, John Trenbeath, Juan Vaca, David Warhol, Charis Weiss (my lovely wife), Ryan Weiss (my awesome son), Greg Wilcox, Jeffrey Wittenhagen, and Steve Woita. You can find their biographies at the back of this book.

Special thanks for various images in the book to Ed Meyer, Leonard Herman, Rick Kelsey, Matt Henzel (videogameobsession.com), Joe Santulli (digitpress.com), Dain Anderson (nintendoage.com), www.MobyGames.com, and www.retromags.com. Props also to Thor Thorvaldson, the talented artist responsible for the beautiful centerfold; and Charis Weiss and Geoff Smith for the author photos.

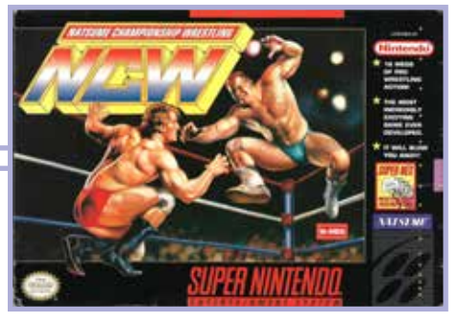
Special thanks to Ben Reeves, who wrote the excellent foreword, and to Charis Weiss and Kevin Burnett, who helped me with computer issues that inevitably arise every time I write a book. Special thanks to the late, great Dolores O'Riordan and her band the Cranberries, whom I listened to obsessively while working on the book.

Special thanks to patrons of the *SNES Omnibus* project: Chris Bannon, Jason Breininger, Charles Bremer, Michael Furuli, Coderpillar Gaming, Adam Burkholder, Jason Bycroft, Jonathan Bycroft, Gregory Carr, Tod Curtis, Mathew Daley, Matt Daughtery, Matt Flammger, Cliff Friedel, Matt Fry, Michael Furuli, Jeff Geske, Josh Gilbertson, David Guiot, John Harrod, Marie Hereda, Michael Hodson, Bennie Hooker, Ken Horowitz, Zoe Howard, Andrew Hubbard, Brandon Hudson, Michelle Ireland, Jeremiah Jones-Goldstein, Brad Kilgore, Mike King, Russ Kumro, Anthony La Gambina, Peter Lindsay, Brendan McGowan, Kale Menges, Matt Miller, Patrick Miller, Derek Morris, Rob Nava, Chris Obugene, Kris Randazzo, Alvin Rasing, Reboot Arcade Bar, Jason Reiter, Jarrett Riley, Joe Saar, Alex San Juan Jr., Cabel Sasser, Scott Saunders, Barry Shank, Adam Sharp, Jermaine Sharper, Holt Slack, Andy Slaven, Michael Smith, Bill Speiden, Shane Stein, Paul Tesi, Anthony Valentino, Mike Vito, Jozef Vogel, Tim Wendel, and Chris Whitaker.

SUPER NINTENDO GAMES N–Z

Natsume Championship Wrestling

PUBLISHER: Natsume.
DEVELOPER: Natasume.
GAME TYPE: Sports/Wrestling, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
YEAR: 1994.



An Americanized version of Japan's *Zen-Nippon Pro Wrestling Dash: Sekai Saikyō Tag* for the Super Famicom, *Natsume Championship Wrestling* is a side-view professional wrestling game that scrolls a little to the left and right to show the entire ring, along with the floor space around the ring (where fights often spill over). Modes of play include: Championship Tournament, Championship Tag Match, Round Robin, Round Robin Tag Match, and Exhibition Match, each dependent more on spacing and timed button presses than mindless button mashes.

While the Japanese game has sixteen licensed wrestlers from the All Japan Pro Wrestling league, each of the twelve playable characters in this version is generic: Asteroid, Conan, The Viper, Spike, Python, M. Roach, The Phantom, Big Ape, K-Bruto, H. Snake, Fangz, and J. Kraze. Each has his own theme song, and there are more than fifty different fighting moves, including punch, kick, grapple, stomp, sleeper hold, backdrop, piledriver, guillotine drop, brain buster, kitchen sink, shoulder throw, kneedrop, and powerbomb. Players can even climb the turnbuckles and do rope and running attacks. During fights, in which each wrestler has ten minutes to pin the other wrestler down for three seconds or keep him out of the ring for ten seconds, a referee paces the ring, and animated fans look on and cheer. Three difficulty levels are available: easy, normal, and hard.

While the game hardly lives up to the hyperbole on the box, which hails it as "the most incredibly exciting game ever developed," it is a solid wrestling sim with smooth animation and legit-looking moves. The graphics are merely serviceable (there is only one ring, and some of the bulky fighters look too similar to one another), but diehard fans of the genre should have some fun.

Notable Quotable:
"Kids and true wrestling fanatics may enjoy this boring imitator, but don't count on it to satisfy them for long. Pin this one to the mat and don't let it up until it screams 'Uncle!'" – *GamePro* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"One of *NCW*'s major points is that both fighters have a very large health bar, which, when depleted, simply reveals another bar underneath. With six bars total, it can take a while before your opponent is worn out, but thankfully that also means the same goes for you. A welcome feature is that your health will actually regenerate, and the rate at which it does will increase the lower your remaining amount gets. You won't lose even if you lose all your health, although it pretty much will be over for you: the only way to win in this game is to pin your opponent for three seconds, or keep them out of the ring for ten seconds. There are also no rules to abide by, so feel free to go all out on your opponent until their health is low enough to throw and keep them out of the ring or pin them. The game is fairly standard graphics-wise, with decent-sized sprites and a loosely animated crowd, though there's nothing too amazing. The music is actually pretty catchy. . . The themes are the same as in the original Japanese game, minus those belonging to the four missing characters, of course." – Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the SNES game for the Wii Virtual Console.

Insider Insight:
I grew up a big fan of pro wrestling. I lived in Toronto, Canada, in the '80s and '90s, so pretty much all that I saw was World Wrestling Federation (later the WWE). Each week I sat in front of the TV, enthralled before such larger-than-life characters as Hulk Hogan, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, Andre the Giant, and later Bret "Hitman" Hart and Shawn Michaels.

Growing up, that was all the wrestling I knew; I thought WWF was all that was out there. I had no idea until later in life that there were other professional wrestling leagues like the NWA, WCW, and ECW. In fact, the first time I ever heard of anything other than the WWF was through a video game called *Natsume Championship Wrestling*.

I was at a video store, looking for a video game to rent. I had just returned *Battletoads in Battlemaniacs* for the SNES and wanted to rent something else. I was looking through the available games (trust me, if you never went through this experience, you truly have not lived!) and saw it: NCW, in giant red, white, and blue block letters, with two animated wrestlers on the cover. I remember thinking, "What is this? Who are these people? I've never seen them in the WWF!" Curious, I rented it. When I got home to play the game, I remember the opening three notes and "Natsume Championship Wrestling" swirling onto the screen, and I thought, "There is another pro wrestling league!"

Of course, *Natsume Championship Wrestling* was not based on a real league, and the game itself was decent, but that day completely opened up my world view. After playing the game I started researching what else was out there and discovered a whole new world of pro wrestling. So thank you M. Roach, Fangz, Big Ape, J. Kraze, and K. Bruto (who was a Mr. Perfect look-alike, by the way): though you were fictional characters in a fictional game, you led me to other real wrestling leagues. – Arda Ocal

NBA All-Star Challenge

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

One of the highlights of the basketball season every year is NBA All-Star Weekend, which rivals the Super Bowl in terms of glitz, glamour, and media coverage. Unfortunately, *NBA All-Star Challenge* fails to live up to its much-ballyhooed real-life event since the Slam Dunk Contest and the NBA All-Star Game itself are absent. However, players can go at it in a game of One-On-One (including a single elimination Tournament mode), which evokes the classic computer title *Julius Erving and Larry Bird Go One-On-One*. One-On-One is played on a half court, as in the typical street ball version of the game, and there are fouls—charging, blocking, traveling, did not clear the ball, and shot clock violation—but no free throws.

NBA All-Star Challenge features three other modes, each of which is essentially a mini-game: Free Throw Contest, 3 Point Shootout (five different shots from five different locations around the three-point rim), and H.O.R.S.E. (take a shot from anywhere on the court; if you make the shot, the next player can tell where they are supposed to shoot by the "X" mark on the floor). There are twenty-seven NBA stars from which to choose (one from each team from the 1991–92 season), including such studs as Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, Larry Bird, David Robinson, Shawn Kemp, Isaiah Thomas, Karl Malone, and Chris Mullin, each accompanied by a digitized head shot and real-life statistics. The players resemble their flesh-and-blood counterparts to some degree, but it is funny to consider such giants as Hakeem Olajuwon and Patrick Ewing shooting threes. Computer-controlled players with higher three-point percentage in real life will make more threes (on average) than players with a lower three-point percentage. Also released for the Game Boy and Genesis. Followed by *NBA All-Star Challenge 2* (Game Boy).

Notable Quotable:

"Poorly designed basketball . . . grows old fast." – *Video Game Bible, 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"The court has an impressive reflection effect going on, and the players are large and reasonably detailed . . . Instead of the standard press and release for shooting, *NBA All-Star Challenge* is press and press again. I've never played a basketball game like this, and I vastly prefer the other style. And the timing window is so tight on a successful shot that it never seemed like I had much agency in whether the ball went in or not. It felt inconsistent. The other side of the ball is even worse. You can swipe at the ball or jump. Both are too finicky about timing, just like the shooting. I earned more fouls than successful blocks or steals. I get that you don't want defense to be overpowering, but it shouldn't be so difficult that players give up on it completely . . . *NBA All-Star Challenge* lacks depth . . . a basketball-themed mini-game collection. I can't actually imagine paying full price for a game that consists of modes that would be better placed hidden deep in the menu of a more comprehensive basketball game." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

NBA Give 'N Go

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

Create your own custom teams and trade players in *NBA Give 'N Go*, featuring NBA rosters from the 1995 season, complete with player ratings, meaning such stars as Reggie Miller of the Indiana Pacers, Larry Johnson of the Charlotte Hornets, Grant Hill of the Detroit Pistons, and Scottie Pippen of the Chicago Bulls are available. (Michael Jordan had retired at the time, so he is not included.) The game features four modes of play: Arcade, Playoffs, Exhibition, and Season. Options include season length, period length, computer difficulty, and a number of features turned on or off, including time violations, replays, layups, goal tending, home court advantage, and offensive and defensive fouls.

Unlike *Run and Gun* (1993, Konami)—the non-NBA licensed arcade game *NBA Give 'N Go* is patterned after—the home version offers simulation-type rules, not just arcade-style action (though arcade-style action is its strong suit). Like its coin-op counterpart, the port features an unusual close-up vertical viewpoint, as opposed to the more customary side view. As such, player sprites are large and detailed.

The game looks good overall, with a nicely drawn court and goals, along with animated fans in the background. Lively voice effects, dynamic alley-oops, and high-flying dunks evoke the two-on-two action of *NBA Jam*, but *NBA Give 'N Go* features full-on five-on-five basketball (and, of course, a different viewpoint). A solid title for hoops fans. Konami followed with *Run and Gun 2* (1996, arcade) and the NBA in the Zone (various) series.

Notable Quotable:

"*Give 'N Go* adds some sorely needed features missing from *Run and Gun*, but Konami isn't quite there yet. Real players and very good SNES graphics are this game's high points. I wish they would have focused more on solid play mechanics which require skill and precision." – *GameFan Magazine* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Give 'N Go* has an interesting quirk where players are rated per stars. Three max. This changes from game to game randomly. It basically indicates how the player is 'feeling' that game. The more stars, the higher chance he'll have at making baskets. It's a unique feature that factors in the 'human' element of players' feelings on a game-by-game basis. You can still have a good game with a guy who has zero stars, but it's tougher . . . It's fun firing the game up and hoping to see many stars across the board. As it was randomly generated game by game, it added an extra element of spice. Sometimes it would spur me to sit a starter for a bench player—say if the starter had zero stars and the capable bench player was feeling particularly spry with three stars. Good stuff. You gotta love how big the players are. There's a nice 'thickness' to them, and they really do look like the actual stars themselves . . . Unfortunately, though, the game does not account for the size differences. John Stockton is just as tall as Patrick Ewing . . . Player mechanics are accurately mimicked . . . When going for a slam dunk you can press the shoot button to change the dunk animation into a layup midway through. It keeps the opposition honest, and because the game is so block friendly, this scoring alternative is a God-send, especially in two-player games with a buddy . . . Gameplay is not as quick as *NBA Jam* or *NBA Live*." – RVG Fanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

NBA Hang Time

Publisher: Midway.
Developer: Funcom Oslo A/S.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1996.

A nice port of Midway's 1996 arcade game (though the game lacks the player scaling of its coin-op cousin), *NBA Hang Time* was created by the original Midway *NBA Jam* design team, but the name was changed due to Acclaim assuming ownership of the *NBA Jam* moniker with their home releases. The two-on-two action is similar, but the players are bigger, and gamers can now create their own player, using such "parts" as uniform, name, height, weight, power, shooting skill, defensive skill, and head (including a clown head and an alien head). By winning games and/or answering trivia questions, players can make their character more powerful.

Other features in this game include fade-away jumpers, spin moves, alley-oops, and double dunks. Making three alley-oops or double dunks in a row makes both players catch fire. All twenty-nine NBA teams are represented, and the game features 145 star players, including such standouts as David Robinson, Hakeem Olajuwon, Scottie Pippen, Reggie Miller, John Stockton, Karl Malone, Gary Payton, and Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway. As with *NBA Jam* and *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition*, the game is loaded with secrets and hidden players.

The SNES version has slightly better controls, sounds, and graphics than the Genesis version. Multi-tap adapter compatible. Also released for the Nintendo 64 and PlayStation. Released the same year as *NBA Jam Extreme* (arcade, PlayStation, Saturn). Followed by *NBA Maximum Hang Time* (1996), which is a software update to the arcade version, and *NBA Showtime: NBA on NBC*, which hit the arcades, Dreamcast, Nintendo 64, and PlayStation in 1999, and the Game Boy Color in 2000.

Notable Quotable:

"The players look completely different from what you're used to: they are very large and you can see their individual faces more clearly than in previous games of the series. While the game still doesn't scale like the arcade title, the graphics are a considerable improvement. The look is almost exactly the same as the Genesis version, but it should come as no surprise that this cart has more vibrant color . . .The game is fun for arcade fans not looking for a detailed simulation. It also is a blast to play with friends, especially with a multi-player adapter. The create player feature gives this game a clear edge over the others in the series. For those having both systems, I prefer the control on the Super NES version. The turbo is on the shoulder triggers, making it easier to use the other buttons with the thumb. The Genesis version controls fine, but the layout is better on the Super NES pad for this type of game (not for fighters though!)." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"In case you ever wondered what ever happened to the old *NBA Jam*, it apparently degenerated into a mess called *NBA Hang Time*. The box description sounds good, promising five-man rosters, new moves, create-a-player, and codes galore. Sure enough, you get the same arcade-style, turbo-charged, above-the-rim brand of arcade basketball. As in *NBA Jam*, chaos and razzle-dazzle reign supreme. Expect plenty of acrobatic slam-dunks but don't expect any foul calls . . .Following on the heels of a great-looking game like *NBA Jam*, who would have suspected *NBA Hang Time* would suffer from such shoddy graphics!? The players are poorly proportioned and their heads look stretched out . . .players suffer from unsightly pixelation, especially when crowded together. At times it's hard to tell if the ball passed through the net, and I've witnessed shots counted as threes that were clearly inside the arc. The player pictures only bear a passing resemblance to the actual players . . .The audio is limited to generic beats and a repetitive commentator." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

Sports have never been my thing. Trying to force me into liking sports, my dad would constantly pull me from my Nintendo and Power Rangers to watch football or hunting shows. Later on, I did get a few random sports games in a lot from a yard sale, which is when I became a huge fan of *NBA Hang Time*, which was produced by the makers of *NBA Jam*, complete with players catching on fire and ridiculous slam dunks.

Not only was there a strange character creator that let users make werewolves, aliens, and clowns, but the two-player and even four-player action was awesome. There is a reason these titles were so popular in arcades: they boil down basketball to the most intense parts of the game, focusing on fast offense.

Close games created rivalries at home, especially between me and my cousins. We never played the four-player games, but instead relished the two-player match-ups. I always played as Toronto, just because of their Raptors mascot. *NBA Hang Time* is the game that made me rethink sports games. I enjoyed a couple baseball games on the NES, but from *Hang Time* on, I have always kept an eye on the more "arcadey" versions of sports. – Alex McCumbers

NBA Jam

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Iguana Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

While it owes some allegiance to Bally/Midway's *Arch Rivals* (arcade, 1989), Midway's *NBA Jam* (arcade, 1993) popularized the notion of arcade-style, over-the-top sports games, influencing such subsequent franchises as *MLB Slugfest*, *NHL Hitz*, *NFL Blitz*, and *NBA Street*. The SNES version of the arcade classic keeps the simple, two-on-two, side-view action largely intact, with players raining down threes and flying high above the rim to perform a variety of outrageous slam dunks. Goal-tending is verboten, and there is a 24-second clock, but there are no fouls or free throws, meaning players can shove one another with impunity. Sinking three baskets in a row without another player scoring sets the hot player "on fire," allowing him to goal-tend and make his shots even more likely to go in.

Other fun features include: turbo boosts, a lively announcer, savable records and stats, hidden power-ups and players (including Bill Clinton), and twenty-seven NBA teams, each comprised of two of their best players, such as John Starks and Patrick Ewing with the New York Knicks and Dan Majerle and Kevin Johnson with the Phoenix Suns. There are some notable absences, including Michael Jordan; Charles Barkley appeared in early printings of the game, but was removed because of the release of his own title, *Barkley: Shut Up and Jam!*

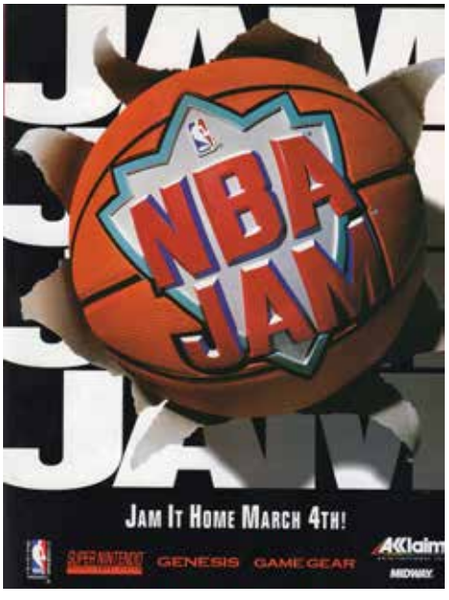
The SNES version of *NBA Jam* has slightly better controls and graphics than its Genesis counterpart, but both versions are great fun, especially when played with friends. Multi-tap adapter compatible. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Sega CD (with the addition of load times, better music, and video clips), *NBA Jam* was later ported to the Xbox, PlayStation 2 and 3, Wii, and Xbox 360.

Notable Quotable:

"Cutting-edge graphics feature lifelike character animations while most other video games of the time generally look more like a cartoon. *NBA Jam*'s designers drew its players to actually resemble what they looked like in real life, and although we take this for granted now on modern systems, the effect is still an impressive feat considering that it was accomplished on the Super Nintendo . . . With fast-paced, addictive gameplay, a catchy musical score, and graphics that are still easy on the eyes today, *NBA Jam* has certainly aged well and, despite its tenuous connection with reality, stands as the definitive basketball game of its generation. Although there were many sequels that tweaked the formula with extra bells and whistles, none exceeded the original in core gameplay quality. Indeed, it is a testament to the excellent game design of this first release in the series that its developers and publishers were able to later repackage what was essentially the same game for years while making few changes." –Spencer McIlvaine (www.nintendolife.com)

Notable Quotable:

"When my friend Eric and I saw the first screenshots of *NBA Jam* in a magazine back in 1993, we thought it was the dumbest game ever. The players were soaring 10 feet over the rim and performing preposterous slam-dunks. After reading several enthusiastic reviews, however, I broke down and bought the game anyway. That turned out to be a major milestone in my game-playing career, because *NBA Jam* quickly became the premiere sports game of its time . . . an impressive translation of the popular arcade game, with the same crisp graphics, fluid animation, responsive controls, catchy music, and clear sound effects. *Jam* offered a degree of speed and non-stop action you didn't often see in sports games of the time . . . *NBA Jam* does have a few minor flaws. The turbo is so plentiful that you can practically use it during the entire game, and blocking shots is nearly impossible. Non-dunking players such as John Stockton can slam, destroying what little realism there is. Lastly, the computer has the annoying habit of making full court, last-second shots at the end of each half." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



NBA Jam: Tournament Edition

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Iguana Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Tournament Edition features the same type of highly entertaining two-on-two action as the original *NBA Jam*. However, there are a number of fresh features, including: nine new dunks; rookie and all-star teams; more secret surprises and hidden players (such as Hillary Clinton); player substitutions after every quarter (adding some strategy to the arcade-style format); Hot Spots on the court (random areas denoted by circles that are worth more points); and power-ups to grab (including faster speed, unlimited turbo, dunking from anywhere, and the ability to cause an earthquake). Each of the twenty-seven NBA teams now includes three players, and gamers must select two of them before starting play.

Michael Jordan is still absent, but there are many stars present, such as Reggie Miller, Rick Smits, and Derrick McKey of the Indiana Pacers and Larry Johnson, Alonzo Mourning, and Tyrone "Muggsy" Bogues of the Charlotte Hornets. Multi-tap adapter and Super NES Mouse compatible. Based on the 1993 arcade game, this fantastically fun game was also released for such systems as the 32X (with player scaling, bigger players, and smoother animation), Genesis, Saturn, and Jaguar. Followed by *NBA Jam Extreme* (arcade, PlayStation, Saturn), *NBA Jam 99* (N64, Game Boy Color), *NBA Jam 2000* (N64), *NBA Jam 2001* (Game Boy Color), *NBA Jam 2002* (Game Boy Advance), and *NBA Jam: On Fire Edition* (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360).

Notable Quotable:

"Acclaim's added a few options for the home release that don't appear in the arcade version; for instance, during a special mode, randomly-appearing icons on the court give players temporary power-ups, like turbo, three-point accuracy, and super dunking (and not just from half court this time, either; prepare to pull off slams from the opposite basket). Random, exciting elements like these keep the action lively and make *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition* worth a few thousand replays." – *Flux* (October 1994)

Insider Insight:

As a high school freshman when the game crashed into arcades in 1993, I absolutely loved the original *NBA Jam*. Both solo and with friends, I spent countless hours (and quarters) at nearby coin-op parlors, furiously attempting to master the art of high-flying, turbocharged, two-on-two basketball. Indeed, I so enjoyed the game that I cold-called lead programmer/designer Mark Turmell at Williams Electronics just to tell him how phenomenal I thought it was. (Yes, I really did this.) He was a very nice guy, and we spoke at length. Most excitingly, he told me about an upcoming sequel in the works, and if I had any ideas for it, to please send him a letter with my suggestions, as he would love to consider more players' perspectives. I must admit I never followed through; he even offered to put my name in the credits if they used my input (imagine being fourteen years old and hearing that), and I still could not get my act together to reply. But I eagerly awaited the arrival of that sequel, *NBA Jam: Tournament Edition*.

It quickly became my new arcade must-play, and soon after ported beautifully to the SNES with updated team rosters. This hooked me right in; my hometown Dallas Mavericks were perhaps the original game's weakest squad (which is what happens when you lead the NBA in losses that year), and *Tournament Edition* significantly upgrades their players and abilities. It was an even greater thrill to unlock numerous secret players, including the game designers and celebrities. And I do not think I will ever tire of hearing that announcer yell "Boomshakalaka!" and "He's on fire!" I may never have sent Mr. Turmell that letter, but at least I could openly thank him for another incredible game. –Shane Stein

NBA Live 95

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Hitmen Productions.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

The follow-up to *NBA Showdown*, *NBA Live 95* kicked off the critically acclaimed *NBA Live* series and set a new standard for basketball video games. The game trumps *Showdown* with a host of new features, including passing in mid-air, slow-motion dunks, rockin' tunes, a turbo button, and, most distinctively, a thirty-degree perspective that opens up the view of the court. Other features include: TV-style presentation, digitized photo-enhanced starting lineup intros, three difficulty levels, alley-oops, passing animations, four defensive sets, forty-six offensive plays, the ability to trade players, the ability to dish off the ball in mid-air, humorous animations (such as players shaking their head after being knocked to the floor), and player and user stats saved via battery backup.

All twenty-seven NBA teams of the time are featured, plus two All-Star and four custom squads. Modes of play include Exhibition, Playoffs, and a full or reduced Season. The game looks fantastic, sporting recognizable renderings of such stars as Gary Payton, Kevin Johnson, Karl Malone, Latrell Sprewell (yes, he was very good, even though he is largely forgotten now), David Robinson, and Hakeem Olajuwon. *NBA Live 95* boasts fast, fun, five-on-five action that has held up remarkably well over the years. Multi-tap adapter compatible. The Genesis version is also great, but it only lets four gamers join in on the fun.

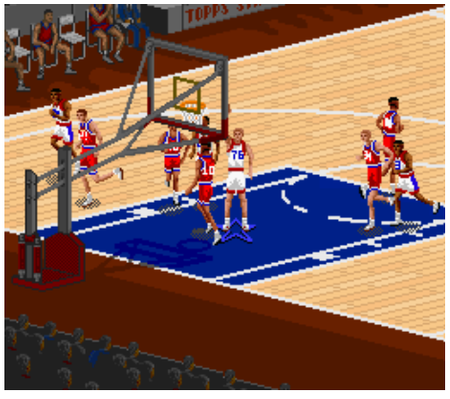
Notable Quotable:
"Take heart, hoop fans. Your sport has been represented in a video game like no other. *NBA Live 95* captures the look, attitude, and strategy of professional roundball, and in truest NBA tradition, I must say, 'I love this game!'" – *Game Players* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"It doesn't happen very often, but occasionally a game developer or publisher puts all of the pieces together and creates a game without peer. A game that is so seamless and without perceptible flaw that the controller feels like it is an extension of your body and that play becomes effortless to the point where you question whether you are living the experience or merely involved in playing within it." – *GameFan Magazine* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"This is the first game where I've been so caught up in the action that I've actually felt physically spent afterwards. You really feel like you've been running up and down the court with offensive and defensive responsibilities. A big feature of this game is an improved 'view-of-the-court' perspective. The visibility of passing lanes has really opened up from previous basketball games, and this added depth really adds to a more natural flow . . . The rebounding is cool . . . you see your rebounder go up and grab it with his hands . . . All the players' real strengths and weaknesses are featured. Just like in the real league, where you kind of get the feeling the Orlando Magic could throw out the Three Stooges or Charlie's Angels with Shaquille O'Neal and Penny Hardaway and still win, your use of Orlando's offense will revolve around these two superstars." – *Electric Playground* (April 1995)

Insider Insight:
NBA Live 95 stands out to me for, of all reasons, its cover photograph of the 1994 New York Knicks/Houston Rockets NBA Finals. Nothing against the game's content; it is a solid 5-on-5 basketball title and plenty fun to play. But the cover has become a time-stamped reminder of perhaps the most inadvertently bizarre sporting event I ever attended, which was not actually those NBA Finals, but rather, the Texas Rangers/Oakland A's baseball game at the Ballpark in Arlington that took place the very same day as the finals' game five. That day also happened to be my sixteenth birthday—June 17, 1994. I attended that Rangers game with several friends specifically for my birthday, with our plans being to watch the Knicks/Rockets series afterward on television.

The Rangers/A's game was a typically entertaining contest in front of a packed crowd, but by perhaps the fifth or sixth inning, most fans seemed to have left their seats. And indeed, within minutes, the ballpark inexplicably looked half empty. What could possibly be going on, I thought? This made no sense at all with a tight game on the field. Then we looked up at the concourses, where fans by the thousands stared intently at the indoor TV monitors, utterly ignoring the baseball game. Curious beyond belief, we scrambled to the nearest screen . . . on which OJ Simpson's Ford Bronco led dozens of police cars on his infamous LA freeway chase. Suffice to say, that evening we watched very different TV programming than the Knicks/Rockets NBA Finals match. And that is where *NBA Live 95* comes in. I may have missed that game five, and as a Dallas Mavericks fan would otherwise over time think little of it. But the cover photo never lets me forget. – Shane Stein



NBA Live 96

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Hitmen Productions.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

NBA Live 96 offers much of the same great gameplay as *NBA Live 95*, but adds a number of fresh features, including: on-the-fly play calling, animated play diagrams, basketball trivia, revolving billboards on the sideline, spin moves, crowd chants and free throw interaction, tip slams, and power dunks. Most importantly, gamers now have the ability to create, draft, edit, and trade their own players, making room for such unauthorized legends as Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley. There are new special moves as well, such as Gary Payton's double-clutch shot, Grant Hill's power slams, and Chris Webber's tip-dunks.

Other aspects of the game include alley-oops, blocked dunks, savable stats (via battery backup), player drafts and trades, mid-air passing, turbo-charged fast breaks, and three modes of play: Exhibition, Playoffs, and Season. All twenty-nine NBA teams of the day are featured (including expansion clubs Toronto and Vancouver), plus two All-Star and four custom teams. There are more than sixty offensive plays and ten defensive sets to choose from. The game has terrific graphics, boasting recognizable renderings of such stars as Scottie Pippen, Dan Majerle, Shawn Kemp, Karl Malone, Dennis Rodman, Vlade Divac, and Jason Kidd. Multi-tap adapter compatible. The Genesis version is a fine simulation as well, but it only lets four gamers join in on the action. Also released for the Game Boy and PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:

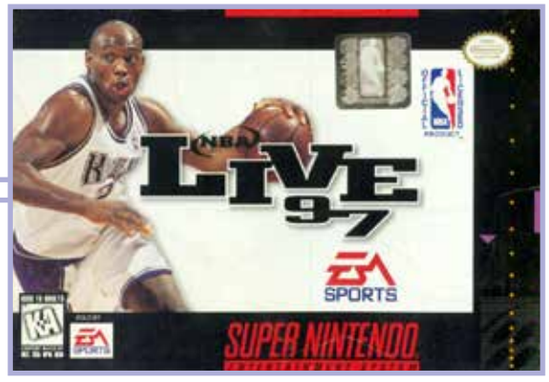
"The *NBA Live* series got its start on the Genesis, but the SNES edition of *NBA Live 96* is clearly better, thanks to sharper graphics and clear sound effects. In addition, holding in the shoulder buttons to initiate turbo is much more convenient than the awkward Genesis controller scheme. In terms of gameplay, *NBA Live 96* offers nonstop action and realistic gameplay. It's a huge step up from *NBA Showdown*. With the five-player multi-tap, you and four friends can even control an entire team! The only thing I don't like about the game are its terribly pixelated hardwood floors. Otherwise, *NBA Live 96* is a slam dunk." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The engine that worked so well in *NBA Live 95* is still here, and the overall look is nearly identical. Upon closer inspection, however, you'll notice a lot of subtle refinements designed to bring out the shine of an already polished game. The graphics have been touched up with more player animations. This is evident with the new spin and crossover dribble, which can be performed simply by double-tapping the 'X' button. A lot of the dunks and shots look smoother as well, making the game more exciting to play. There's nothing like spinning around a defender, going up for the shot, and having a teammate jump in for the alley-oop. This sense of control is what makes this series so great—that and the surge of adrenaline you get as you hit the turbo button just before slamming the ball." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

NBA Live 97

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: NuFX.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1996.



This third game in the ubiquitous *NBA Live* series is similar to its predecessors, but it does include some noteworthy (if less than groundbreaking) new features, including: larger players; reverse layups and dunks; manual steal controls (steals were performed automatically in earlier iterations); a player lock feature (which lets you control the same player the entire game); updated rosters (to reflect the 1996–97 season); and two new modes of play: 2-on-2 and 3-on-3 half-court games. Other features in the game include replays, Turbo mode, create-a-player, three levels of defensive pressure, pick and roll plays, double teams, fouls, tip-offs, hook shots, dunks (of course), tip-ins, a shot clock, crossover dribbling, injuries, player stamina, and hand-checks (for getting a better position on your defender).

All twenty-nine NBA teams are featured (comprising more than 300 players), plus two All-Star and four custom teams. A pregame introduction begins the five-on-five basketball action, complete with team comparisons and player introductions. NBA fans will recognize such popular players as Reggie Miller, Larry Johnson, Mitch Richmond (featured on the cover), Shaquille O'Neal, and Kobe Bryant, who makes his video game debut. If you do not want to play basketball, you can show off your knowledge by taking part in a Trivia Quiz. Or you can select Coaching Mode, where all you do is call plays, make substitutions, and perform other roles of delegation. Includes battery backup and multi-tap adapter support. *GamePro* magazine once called *NBA Live 97* "The best Super NES basketball game of all time." Also released for the Genesis (for up to four players), PlayStation (for up to eight players), and Saturn (for up to ten players).

Fun Fact: In Issue #154 (May 1997) of *Computer Gaming World*, the computer version of *NBA Live 97* won the "Sports Game of the Year" award.

Notable Quotable:

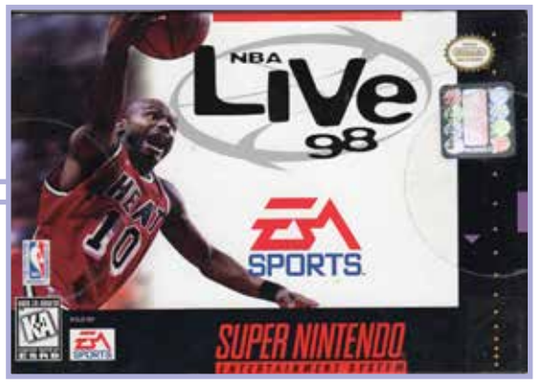
"Anyone who grew up with a Super Nintendo and loved basketball back in the mid '90s most likely would remember this franchise well . . . fast-paced basketball . . . when it came to simulation, *NBA Live* ruled the roost . . . Before *NBA Live*, the pickings were pretty slim." – RVGFanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The ability to create players is phenomenal. You can choose the player's height, weight, college, number, and name, along with many other options . . . The rosters are accurate for 1997, as are the logos, stadiums, and jerseys . . . The graphics are great, with player sizes accurately interpreted, although on occasion a 6' guard will block a 7'2" center's shot . . . Shooting is easy; a tap of a button and the shot is underway, and that same button shoots dunks, layups, jumpers, and the occasional 3. Sound is okay, but the crowd noise is monotonous and gets annoying after a long time of playing. Fortunately, the game includes options to turn off music and crowd noise, although they still cheer when a shot is made and boo when there is a foul . . . *NBA live 97* is one of the better NBA games for the SNES." – SNES Master (www.gamefaqs.com)

NBA Live 98

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Tiertex Design Studios.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1997.



Released late in the life of the SNES, this was the fourth and final *NBA Live* game for the 16-bit system. The gameplay is essentially the same as the other titles in the series, featuring TV-style presentation, creatable players, customizable rules (for goal-tending and the like), three difficulty levels, multi-player adapter support, dynamic five-on-five action, a thirty-degree view of the court, and battery backup for saving stats, season progress, roster moves, and custom teams. *NBA Live 98* does incorporate a few new flourishes to the formula, including team and player practice modes, a more realistic trading mode incorporating player ratings, a 3-Point Contest, and a CPU-generated mid-season All-Star game culled from the top performers throughout the league.

You can play Simulation mode, which incorporates the rules and regulations of real basketball, or you can select Arcade mode, which is freeform, anything-goes basketball, where there are no fouls and players are invincible. In the aforementioned simulation mode, you can customize the rules to your choosing. You can play with or without defensive fouls, offensive fouls, out of bounds violations, backcourt violations, traveling, goal-tending, three-second calls, foul outs, fatigue, and injuries. All 300 players (spread over twenty-nine teams) have been updated to reflect the 1997–98 NBA Season, and you will have fun controlling such stars as John Stockton, Karl Malone, Tim Hardaway (featured on the box), Scottie Pippen, and Grant Hill.

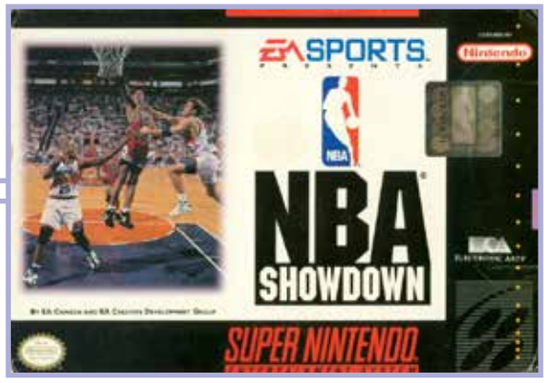
The action is viewed from a NBA on TNT and TBS TV-style point of view, complete with authorized permission from the networks. Also released for the Genesis (for up to four players), PlayStation (for up to eight players), and Saturn (for up to eight players). Followed by numerous sequels, including *NBA Live 1999* (PlayStation, Nintendo 64).

Notable Quotable:
"The game has made no effort to improve upon previous versions . . . Essentially this version is just like all the others with an updated roster." – Joshua Hoffman (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"For NBA fans past and present, this is one of the most consistent basketball games ever made. The players' height, weight, basketball skills, statistics, and stats are all accounted for . . . This curbs the basketball fix that old knees and a bad back can't." – Amazon Customer (amazon.com)

NBA Showdown

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Electronic Arts.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



NBA Showdown was the follow-up to EA's *Bulls vs. Blazers and the NBA Playoffs*. Though still slow, the game is faster than its predecessor and boasts a number of new features, including battery backup, player trades, injuries, substitutions, player fatigue, and customizable teams. Replays are available as well. The game boasts all twenty-seven NBA teams of the time, plus two All-Star line-ups from the 1993 season. There are signature moves for thirty different players, such as Shaq's Gorilla Dunk, Larry Johnson's Hang on The Rim Jam, Shawn Kemp's Bounce-Ball Slam, and the largely forgotten Harold Miner's Around the World Slam.

Detailed, smoothly rendered graphics mean the players are largely recognizable. Modes of play include Exhibition, Playoffs, and a full eighty-two-game Season. The elevated view of the five-on-five action is from the side (with horizontal scrolling to show the entire court), and free throws adopt the T-meter system found in *Bulls vs. Blazers*. Released for the Genesis as the four-player *NBA Showdown '94*. Followed by: *NBA Live 95*.

Notable Quotable:

"The game's sensational play features, updated 12-men rosters, and trade-player option make the game a must-buy for basketball fans. It slam-dunks the competition." – *Game Players* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*NBA Showdown* is an improvement over 1992's game, but those expecting a revamped engine will have to wait a little while longer . . . While *NBA Showdown* still moves at a slow pace, the considerable amount of new features helps make up for it, offering basketball fans everything but the proverbial kitchen sink . . . You'll be able to tell Horace Grant from his goggles or Kevin Johnson from his goatee . . . Despite the familiar look of the players and courts, just about everything else is new—making this the most complete basketball game released thus far for the SNES . . . there are still quite a few annoyances . . . blocking is completely overdone—it is not uncommon for players to have more blocks within a few minutes than they should have in a complete game . . . movement is still on the choppy side, and the pace is very slow. It is also extremely difficult to grab rebounds because you can't see your player amidst the sea of teammates and computer opponents. The horizontal court and large players also make it hard to tell if a teammate is open for a pass." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:
Sometimes you just have to say goodbye. *NBA Showdown* is proof, however, that farewells don't have to be entirely sad.

While EA Sports essentially kept the same engine in place for the *NHL* series for its entire run on the Super Nintendo, *NBA Showdown* was the final game to utilize the engine from their original *Lakers versus Celtics and the NBA Playoffs*. From there on out, *NBA Live* became the focal point of EA Sports' roundball regime. That doesn't mean *Showdown* is awful, though. Quite the contrary.

Simply put, it's the best EA Sports basketball game that uses that rusty, old, rickety, obsolete engine. Add in the ability to trade players and a deep and authentic 12-man roster and it was a must-own basketball game. Well, if you were into simulation-style games. Remember, this was the era dominated by *NBA Jam*. If you loved to have fun and play basketball games, Midway's arcade classic was and still is always the first choice. Nevertheless, if you were a stats geek and wanted a more authentic experience, *Showdown* was the best choice you had at the time. A year later, however, the *NBA Live* franchise proved to be a much better basketball sim, which somewhat dims any real legacy *Showdown* could have had.

In terms of history, the game's developer, Allan Johanson, also worked as the NES programmer for *Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego?* and the first two games in the underrated *Test Drive* franchise, as well as a few games in the *NBA Live* series. As a result, the game is an enjoyable simulation, with a cool backstory and connection to a few other classic games, but is otherwise passable considering the bevy of better basketball bonanzas available on the Super Nintendo. – Patrick Hickey Jr.

NCAA Basketball

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Like *NHL Stanley Cup*, *NCAA Basketball* plays a realistic version of its respective sport and benefits from Mode 7 graphics, providing gamers with a rotating, over-the-player's-shoulder perspective of the court. There are forty-four teams from which to choose, each outfitted with authentic stats and uniform colors and logos (player names are fake). Teams are from the Big East, Big 8, ACC, SEC, and SWC conferences, though certain schools are missing because rights could not be secured. There are no numbers on the players' uniforms, but there are little shadows on the court beneath their feet.

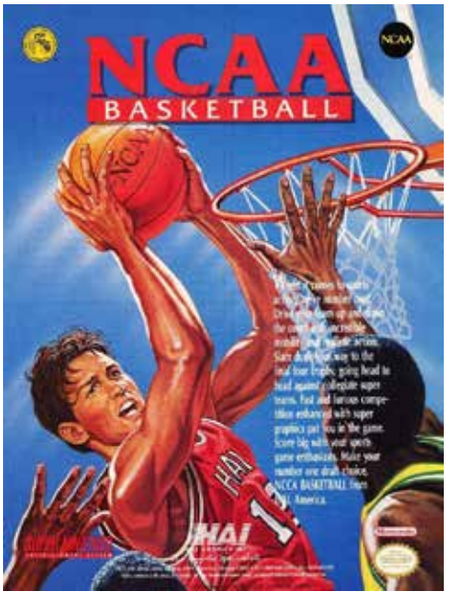
In addition to direct player control, gamers can act as coach by substituting players, calling timeouts, selecting from fourteen different plays (seven offensive sets, seven defensive sets), and more. Three-pointers, blocks, steals, fouls, penalties, five types of dunks, and other roundball trappings add to the fun. Surroundings are strangely dark (the crowd makes noise but you can't see them), but this is a small gripe. Sound effects include cheering, dribbling, swishing nets, shoe squeaks, referee whistles, and occasional organ music and voice effects (such as "foul on point guard"). Battery backup lets you save four different games or seasons. *Dick Vitale's "Awesome, Baby!" College Hoops* for the Genesis provides a similar camera system, but is a far inferior game. Known as *World League Basketball* in Europe and *Super Dunk Shot* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"This game provides owners of the Super NES with an absolutely incredible, in-your-face basketball simulation that not only takes full advantage of the system's Mode 7 scaling and rotation, but also puts up a decent game of b-ball to boot!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The camera follows the ball closely, making three-point bombs look awesome. Simple controls make it easy to pass, steal, and shoot. Unfortunately, there's no turbo button, and you can't pass on the run, killing any fast break opportunities. Special low-post moves and



thundering dunks bring a feeling of satisfaction, and I love how the players automatically crash the boards. The game is well-balanced, and the CPU provides a worthy challenge. Occasionally its non-aggressive style can lull you into a false sense of security just before it finds an open man under the hoop . . . It's not realistic like *NBA Live* or flashy like *NBA Jam*, but if you're looking for college hoops on your SNES, this isn't half bad." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
Sports games were almost always my last choice when picking a video game to play until *NCAA Basketball* was released in 1992. The game utilized the Super Nintendo's Mode 7 graphics effects in a clever way, allowing the court to rotate in accordance to the player's position. It made for quite a dynamic and believable three-dimensional simulation—a first for a console video game.

According to the magazine reviewers and my peers, it played a rather dull game of b-ball. However, I did not care because I was absolutely enthralled by its appearance. The pseudo-3D effect was eye candy and impressed me each and every time. Call me shallow, but the paint job made the game. It was so mesmerizing that I failed to notice that the game was being played in what some would call a blue void. The game literally had no background, so everything off the court ceased to exist—no stands, fans, cheerleaders, nor anything else. The team rosters were fictional, too. But I simply did not care; I just wanted to watch that court rotate in its magical way. – Michael Thomasson

Insider Insight:
I grew up in a small town in North Dakota. High school basketball was *the* sport, since smaller schools could not afford indoor hockey rinks and we needed some sort of indoor sporting activity to occupy our time in the winter. With that, one of the most popular games on the NES among me and my friends was *Double Dribble*. In 1992, interest in basketball was at a fever pitch for us, with the Chicago Bulls in the beginning of their dominance of the NBA in the '90s, the Duke University Blue Devils winning their second straight NCAA championship, and us anxiously awaiting the next great basketball video game to come out on the recently released Super Nintendo.

When we finally got our hands on *NCAA Basketball* late that year, we were really excited to get into it! I don't think any of us knew much about it going in, except for the fact that it was a new basketball game and that we had the chance to play as real NCAA teams—specifically Duke University and North Carolina, the alma mater of Michael Jordan. The first impressions we had of the game were that it looked great! The Mode 7 graphics in their 3D isometric style perspective were really quite impressive, as this was the first time we had ever seen this in a game. The camera followed whichever player had the ball smoothly so we never felt lost or like we didn't know what was going on.

However, in spite of the game's great innovations, it just was not quite what we were looking for. The game seemed to be designed as more of a single-player experience, as opposed to the two-player competitive action we had come to love with *Double Dribble*; this despite the fact that there was a two-player option. While the game ran smoothly, it was slower than we would have liked, not the fast-paced, friendship-ending, arcade action we had wanted. The offensive and defensive strategies in the game were quite deep, and good if you wanted to learn about college basketball and wanted to play through the season mode by yourself. Unfortunately, it did not lend itself to a good "pick up and play with your friends" experience. I think this made us appreciate *NBA Jam* when it came out in arcades the next year, since that gave us more reasons to yell at each other. – John Trenbeath

Insider Insight:
NCCA Basketball brings me back to my own halcyon college days at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. I was living in a wild-and-wooly dorm where male and female occupants alternated from door-to-door. This was, by far, my best dorm experience up to that point . . . mostly because the whole floor just legitimately gelled so well.

A good many of these fine, collegiate folk used to congregate in my room, where I held court (so to speak). There we would shoot the bull, listen to music, and, of course, play video games. One of the games that was in heavy rotation was *NCAA Basketball*, as it was an entertaining game to both watch and play.

It was a blast to play because it had rock-solid b-ball mechanics (that featured a color-coded, icon based passing system that was quite novel at the time) and authentic college teams. It was also cool just to watch because of the smooth, 360-degree rotating court (courtesy of Mode 7 graphical wizardry). Although the background (or lack thereof) was a bit jarring, as it appeared the court itself was dropped in the middle of an abandoned blue "Phantom Zone" of some sort.

In light of this breezy, fun-loving environment, I thought a little competition would make dorm life more interesting; I decided to throw an NCAA Tournament of my own using this game that people seemed to dig. For the low price of $5 you could choose your own college squad to guide through the dreaded Gordon Hall bracket of my devious design. The winner would take the pot, which would be all of the collected entry fees.

Approximately twenty-five people signed up to play (including a few females), but ultimately, they all fell to the might of my Syracuse Orangemen and faux Derrick Coleman, who was raining down mad three balls throughout the tourney like he was the second coming of Larry Bird. And it's a damn good thing I won, because I had already spent the money on a beer run earlier in the week. Man, do I miss those days. – Jerry Bonner

NCAA Final Four Basketball

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Bitmasters.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Sixty-four NCAA Division I teams are featured in the fully authorized *NCAA Final Four Basketball*, including such powerhouses as Duke, Kentucky, North Carolina, and UCLA. Three modes of play are available: Practice (two players and the ball, no defense); Exhibition (a single game against two teams); and Tournament (take one team as far as possible in hopes of reaching the Final Four and beyond). Plus, gamers can practice their free throw shooting skills in a special mode that is viewed from behind the player.

Other features and options include: dunks, jump shots, bank shots, fake shots, fake jumps, player fatigue, instant replays, six defensive formations (including man, zone, and full court press), intentional fouls, variable foul calling (none, easygoing, or strict), and adjustable game length (10, 20, 30, or 40 minutes). The game is viewed from the side and scrolls horizontally to show the entire court. A cheering crowd watches the action. Multi-player adapter compatible for four-player action. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The game includes some practice modes in order to learn how to shoot free throws and perform dunks, but other than adjusting the length of the game the options are severely limited. Despite the animation, the poor controls and lack of any substitution or play-calling abilities turn a promising game into a pretty disappointing effort." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*NCAA Final Four Basketball* has a glowing visual presentation . . . The players move gracefully on a well-lacquered court, semi-enthusiastic fans cheer on three sides, and a gaggle of media personnel (or are they judges?) sit frozen in their seats. The booming voice of the announcer adds a realistic presence. The first-person foul-shooting is a nice pace breaker as well. Sadly, these are the highlights of the game: watching a demo unfold and a free-throw mini-game . . . Players are clunky to handle, and the button mappings don't make much sense. It takes pushing the left trigger just to highlight another player to pass to. While pressing turbo and shoot together to drive to the hoop is a good idea in concept, in practice it is far removed from the intuitive turbo mechanism we have in *NBA Jam* . . . It's way beyond the status of a poorly aged game—it's a game that was trash from the get-go. Thankfully for college basketball fans, *College Slam* is a solid third release in the *NBA Jam* series, and even the archaic *NCAA Basketball* has its charms. All told, the SNES certainly had its contributions to the basketball sub-genre, but [this] was not one of them." – SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

NCAA Football

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: The Software Toolworks.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Featuring arcade-style action, *NCAA Football* offers up forty Division I-A teams, each sporting real team colors. Official college logos are present in the menu screens, but not on the players themselves. The greatest teams from the '60s, '70s, '80s, and '90s are featured. Modes of play include: Exhibition, which lets players pick any two squads for a game against a friend or the computer; and Tournament, which involves taking a team through sixteen games in hopes of winning the championship. The scrolling, angled/top-down action runs horizontally, and there are more than sixty plays, including such college staples as the wishbone and the suicide blitz.

To pass the ball, players should cycle through to the preferred receiver, who, after catching the ball, can run, spin, lateral, or dive. While on defense, gamers should switch control to the closest player to make a tackle. Other features include timeouts, variable weather conditions, fake punts and field goals, adjustable quarter lengths, and instant replays. By pressing "select," you can turn a radar screen (a bird's-eye view showing all the players on the field) on and off. The instruction manual boasts a two-page history of college football and diagrams of each offensive and defensive play. Sporting gameplay similar to *Tecmo Super Bowl*, *NCAA Football* was also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

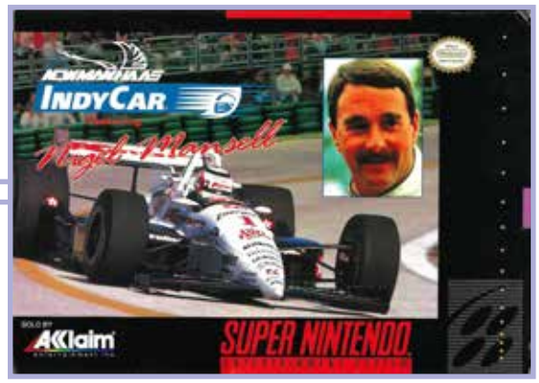
"While lovers of more sophisticated football games may want to pass on this one, *NCAA* is perfect for the novice who wants to get right into the action without having to thumb through pages of instruction." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*NCAA Football* sounds like a nice idea on paper. Take all of what is good from a game like *Tecmo Super Bowl*, but tweak the gameplay and place it in a college setting complete with officially sanctioned NCAA teams. Add some crowd noise and authentic college plays, and you have the makings of an arcade hit played across campuses everywhere . . . Despite good intentions, *NCAA Football* is a pale imitation of *Tecmo Super Bowl* that completely drops the ball in delivering fast-paced, exciting gameplay and tight control . . . The game plays very slowly, just like the earlier sports games for the Super Nintendo, and I don't have to tell you that sluggish player movement in an arcade sports game isn't a pleasant experience. *Tecmo Super Bowl* is much, much more enjoyable and should be picked up by anyone looking for the same type of action promised from this title." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Newman-Haas IndyCar featuring Nigel Mansell

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software.
Game Type: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Viewed from the driver's seat, *Newman-Haas IndyCar featuring Nigel Mansell* is endorsed by the titular racing team (which was formed by actor Paul Newman and racer Carl Haas), and by British CART Indy Car World Series winner Nigel Mansell. Gamers can practice in a single race, attempt to qualify (two laps), or take on twelve other drivers on fifteen tracks (most of which are in North America, and most of which are ovals with extra curves). Arcade and Simulation modes are included, as are manual and automatic controls and a two-player split-screen mode (which reduces the framerate to the point of distraction).

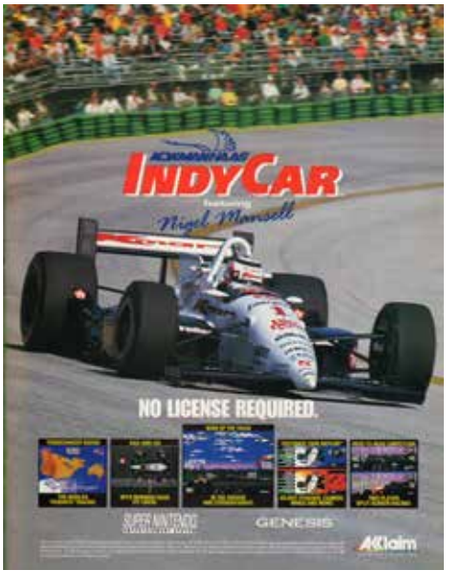
In addition to trying to race past opponents, players must refuel and dodge such obstacles as road signs, buildings, and other cars. If you run into a roadside obstacle, it will merely slow you down, but in the Genesis version it stops you. Excessive crashing damages the car beyond drivability. In the SNES game, you can see more sky because the meters and radar view of the track are superimposed over the top of the screen instead of displayed on a readout below the steering wheel. Overall, *Newman-Haas IndyCar featuring Nigel Mansell* is a passable racer with a clumsy title. The graphics, which feature polygonal buildings and nicely drawn cars, are hit-and-miss, the sounds are forgettable, and the gameplay is just so-so.

Notable Quotable:

"If you have to race every available game, there's decent fun here. But this game isn't as successful as Mansell has been in real life. Overall, it finishes back in the pack." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

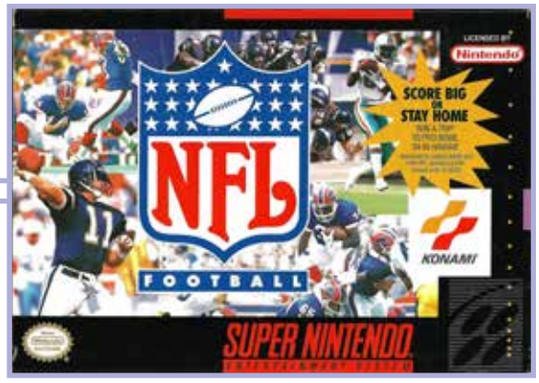
"While the structure of *Newman-Haas* is the same across both the Mega Drive [Genesis] and Super NES versions, the Super Nintendo



version is much faster, building on the engine seen in *World Championship Racing*. This however, comes at a cost, with less detail on each track and a shorter draw distance. The Mega Drive version, conversely, attempts to render 3D objects such as buildings and tunnels, bringing more variety to the stages at the expense of framerate, which is more than halved." – Sega Retro (segaretro.org)

NFL Football

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Park Place Productions.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



Battle for the Super Bowl trophy in *NFL Football*, which features all twenty-eight NFL teams of the era, each rated according to quarterback, running backs, receivers, offensive line, defensive backs, linebackers, defensive line, and special teams. You can play a single Exhibition game or try your luck in the Playoffs. Standard mode lists all the plays in the same order for each team. In Team mode, the plays that a given squad is likely to use are placed in front of the playbook. Selections are based on the strengths of the team and their coach's style. You can run your offense from a shotgun formation, pull a quarterback sneak, or choose from a number of more traditional plays.

Other features and options include audibles, interceptions, onside kicks, no-huddle offense, weather conditions (rain, sun, or snow), and zone and man-on-man defense. Special moves let you stiff-arm would-be tacklers, dive for a loose ball, put on a burst of speed, try a spin move, and do a high step. Mode 7 graphics depict the field at various angles, and the camera zooms in on sacks and touchdowns.

Fun Fact: In 1990, Konami released a top-down, vertical version of *NFL Football* for Nintendo's original Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

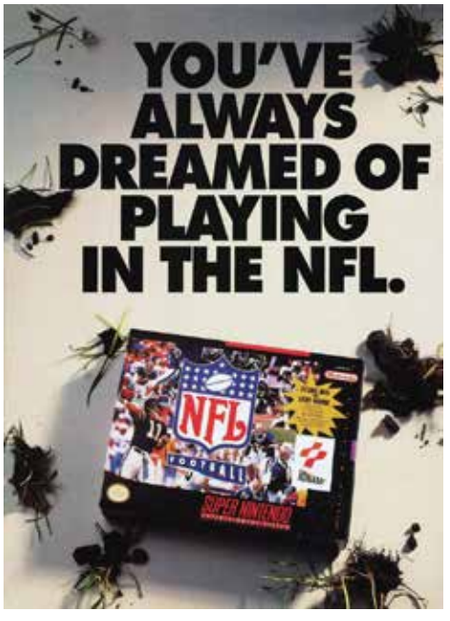
"Nintendo's Mode 7 technology is great for go-kart races, airplane rides, dogfights on the planet Corneria, but not for football. Not unless your stomach is made of steel. I'm gonna throw up." – CGR Undertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Features such as rotation and scaling have been boons to gaming, but they *can* be overused. Anyone who doubts this has only to play *NFL Football*, but we recommend they bring an airsick bag just in case all those effects get to them. If football looked like this on TV, no one would watch it." – *Electronic Games* (July 1993)

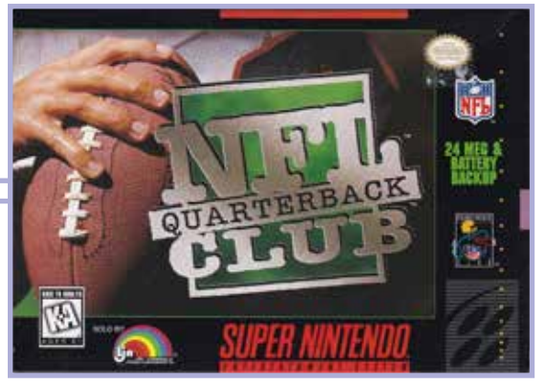
Notable Quotable:

"The programmers spared no expense when it came to details, such as digitized team helmets, cheerleaders, and mini displays of actual stadiums . . . the music pumps up the action, the announcer's voice is crystal clear, and there are good sonic details throughout . . . The problem is the game screen, which unfortunately is in constant motion, providing no established point of view . . . For example, kickoffs appear initially with the kicking team at the top of the screen kicking down to the receiving team . . . However, as soon as the ball is caught, the entire field rotates 180 degrees, placing the return man at the top of the screen running down to the goal line. You'll get dizzy trying to keep up." – *GamePro* (1993)



NFL Quarterback Club

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Iguana Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Boasting 24 Megs of power, *NFL Quarterback Club* features nineteen quarterbacks from the 1993 season: Troy Aikman (Cowboys), Drew Bledsoe (Patriots), Bubby Brister (Eagles), Randall Cunningham (Eagles), John Elway (Broncos), Boomer Esiason (Jets), Jim Everett (Saints), Brett Favre (Packers), Jim Harbaugh (Colts), Jeff Hostetler (Raiders), Jim Kelly (Bills), David Klingler (Bengals), Bernie Kosar (Dolphins), Dan Marino (Dolphins), Chris Miller (Rams), Rick Mirer (Seahawks), Warren Moon (Vikings), Neil O'Donnell (Steelers), and Steve Young (49ers). The manual features a mini bio of each quarterback.

The QB Challenge lets players select an NFL quarterback or one of their own design to compete in a series of four mini-games: Distance, Accuracy, Speed and Mobility, and Read and Recognition. In Simulation Mode, players get to recreate and participate in thirty historical NFL scenarios. NFL Play is the meat of the game, offering Preseason, Season (16 games), Playoffs, and Pro Bowl. Other features and options include: instant replay; variable weather conditions (fair, rain, snow, hot, cold, or auto); grass and artificial turf; official NFL team names and logos; adjustable quarter lengths; three difficulty levels; player animations (showing such moves as spikes, taunts, sacks, and highsteps); and more than 430 offensive, defensive, and QB signature plays. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis.

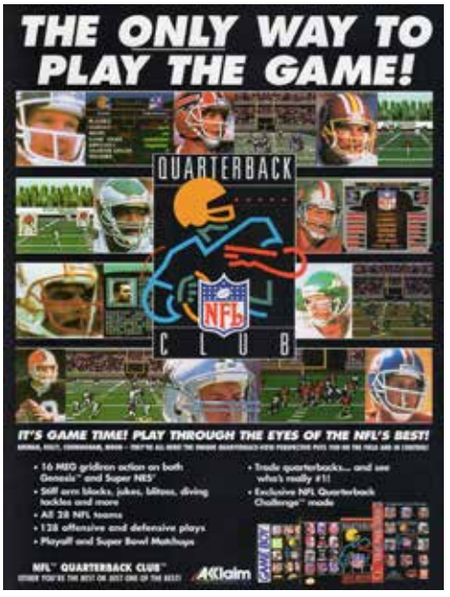
Fun Fact: *NFL Quarterback Club* for the 32X is actually a port of *NFL Quarterback Club '96*.

Notable Quotable:

"Animations in the game and the QB Challenge are quite exceptional. Top it off with cool sound effects and you get an excellent football game . . . Challenging A.I." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The only difference between the SNES and Genesis versions of the game arise in the areas of graphics and sound, where the Genesis lags a bit behind its Nintendo counterpart. But either way you go, *NFL Quarterback Club* is a title worth checking into." – *Game Players* (January 1995)

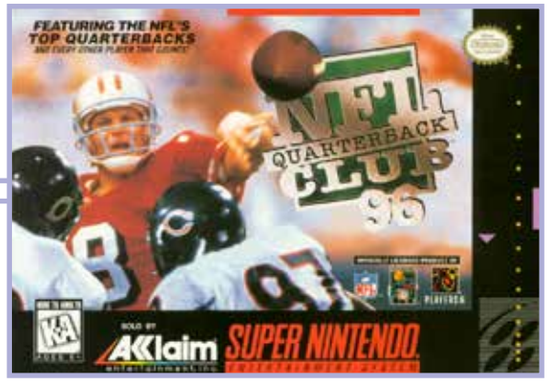


Notable Quotable:

"The game's battery backup is able to store up to five different quarterbacks. Combine all this with a 'Crunch Time' simulator that lets you relive famous game-breaking moments in NFL history and you have a cartridge that's sure to please nearly every football fan!" – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

NFL Quarterback Club '96

Publisher: Acclaim.
Developer: Iguana Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.



Like its progenitor, *NFL Quarterback Club '96* offers an elevated, behind-the-teams view of a horizontal field populated by small players, including such greats as Troy Aikman, John Elway, Brett Favre, Dan Marino, and Drew Bledsoe. This time out, there are more than 800 plays (up from 430+) to call (including 54 hyper audibles), along with more than fifty playable historical NFL scenarios (up from thirty). Gamers can participate in practice, indulge in a full NFL season, or skip ahead to the playoffs. A digitized referee appears after plays, saying things like "incomplete" or "first down."

Other options and features include: replays; substitutions; player progress reports; a pre-game show; variable weather conditions; a no-huddle offense; three different camera angles; three different clock speeds; drag tackles; up and over dives; and 1–5 player action. All twenty-eight NFL teams are customizable. Multi-tap adapter compatible. Also released for the Genesis, Game Boy, Game Gear, and 32X, the last of which did not have "'96" in the title. *NFL Quarterback Club II* for the Game Boy was also released in 1995. Followed by *NFL Quarterback Club '97* (PlayStation, Saturn), *NFL Quarterback Club 98* (N64), *NFL Quarterback Club 99* (N64), and *NFL Quarterback Club 2000* (N64, Dreamcast).

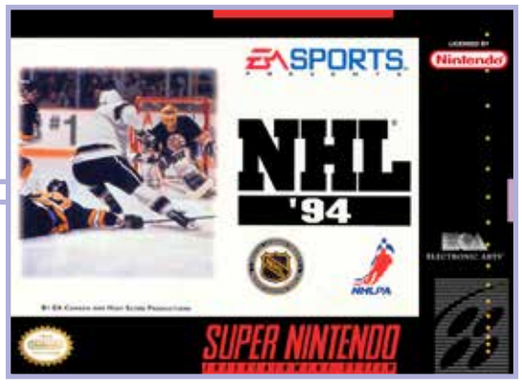
Notable Quotable:
"Either *NFL Quarterback Club* game is very good, but the second game in the series has a little more polish." – SNES Drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"It looks pretty good for a SNES game . . . it's a pretty exhaustive game in terms of features and options . . . I like that you can see a lot of the field in one go." – CrashtestGaming (Youtube)

Notable Quotable:
"Unfortunately, the players are real small and the graphics are pretty bland. Not quite on par with *Madden* or *Primetime*, *QBC* is still a good solid football title that some may like better. Definitely worthy of a look." – *Game Players* (January 1996)

NHL '94

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Electronic Arts.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



Like its Genesis counterpart, *NHL '94* for the SNES is a great game that offers some nice upgrades over the previous installments in the series (*NHL Hockey* for the Genesis and *NHLPA Hockey '93* for both systems), including new player art and animations, direct control over goalies, penalty shots, Shootout mode, harder hitting defenders that execute new cross checks and board checks, new crowd animations, and individualized arenas featuring more than seventy new pieces of music. The game also adds "one-timers," which are "new blistering slap shots" that "make offense faster and more challenging." One advantage the SNES version enjoys is a five-player mode that is more flexible than the Genesis game's more restrictive four-player option. Also, the digitized player portraits in the SNES game are in color.

The game is licensed by the NHLPA and NHL, meaning all the starters are featured, including such stars as Wayne Gretzky and Ed Belfour. All the teams are here as well, including the Florida Panthers and Mighty Ducks of Anaheim expansion squads. The action is viewed from a top-down perspective, with gameplay scrolling vertically (and partially left and right) to show the entire rink. One drawback is that fighting—a popular feature in the previous games—has been removed. Multi-tap adapter compatible. The Sega CD version features digitized speech from Ron Barr, CD sound effects, real organ music, and more than 100 authentic NHL video clips.

Fun Fact: *NHL 14* for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360 features a special 20th Anniversary mode that lets you play a version of *NHL '94*, complete with simple controls, throwback organ music, and classic viewing angles.

Notable Quotable:
"Overall, the SNES upgrade does an outstanding job on improving graphics, sound, and gameplay. However, compared to the Genesis version, the SNES cart is just a bit off its game, but don't let that stop you from hitting the ice." – *GamePro* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The series really hit its stride with *NHL '94*, offering perfectly balanced arcade-style hockey action. That opening theme song gets you totally pumped . . . The playability of *NHL '94* is unrivaled thanks to its pinpoint controls. The new one-timer move makes all the difference in the world. Few things in life are as satisfying as executing a perfect centering pass to a teammate who slaps the puck into the net. *NHL '94* addresses all of the shortcomings that plagued *NHLPA Hockey 93*. The framerate is smoother, the controls are crisp, and the audio is clear. Ferocious body checks knock guys head-over-heels and sometimes send them flying into the bench! The graphics are clean and so razor sharp you may notice little details you couldn't make out on the Genesis. The audio is a bit understated at times, to the point where you can literally hear a puck drop. The goalie looks awesome and I love how he'll cover up the puck if a member of the other team is nearby. *NHL '94* is a masterpiece. I lean slightly towards the Genesis version (it's a bit more fluid), but this edition is still pretty sensational." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
NHL '94 was my belated introduction to ice hockey. Growing up in Dallas, Texas, in the 1980s and early 1990s, I never played the sport. Baseball, basketball, football, and soccer—all the time. But locally, few ice rinks even existed, much less significant hockey opportunities. My only exposure to the sport, really, was playing *Ice Hockey* on the NES—a fun game for sure, but nothing to take too seriously. But in the fall of 1993, the NHL's Minnesota North Stars headed south to become the Dallas Stars. And suddenly in the Big D, hockey was hip. Not quite enough to compel me to take up a new sport (I could hardly even skate), but I eagerly dived into the next best thing: *NHL '94* on the Super Nintendo.

And the game was incredible—great graphics, real teams and players, and outstanding hockey action. My friends and I played it countless times that year, and I quickly advanced from utter hockey neophyte to someone who could at least play it decently in a video game. Meanwhile, between this and watching numerous actual games on TV (and a few at the old Reunion Arena, which has been torn down), I quickly became a huge Stars fan, and my memory of *NHL '94* is indelibly linked to that inaugural season of the team in Dallas. The Stars would advance to greater heights—they captured the 1999 Stanley Cup—and so did my hockey video game collection, with *NHL '95* and further sequels to follow. But *NHL '94* is where it all began. – Shane Stein

Insider Insight:
NHL '94 was released on 16-bit consoles the year after my favorite season in NHL history, 1993—the same year the New York Islanders made a Cinderella-esque run to the NHL semi-finals before losing to the eventual champions, the Montreal Canadiens. As a result, *NHL '94* will always be a special game. Being able to see that team together and playing, even in a virtual sense, puts a smile on my face every single time. Like my escapades with my dad in *NHLPA '93*, I was also the dominant force in the Hickey family in *NHL '94*.

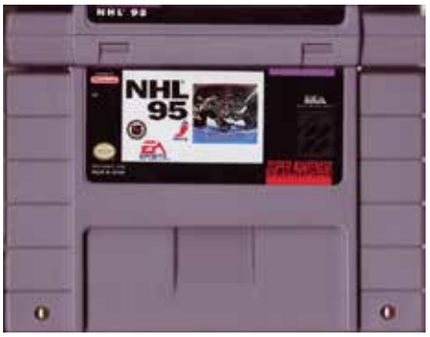
Even though my dad was out of work when it was released and probably played games a bit more than he should have, I was still the man of the house when it came to gaming. It drove him crazy. "How does he do it?" or "This kid is a freak," he'd say, wondering how his eleven-year-old boy could beat him seemingly whenever he wanted.

NHL '94 is also an important game because it introduced the one-timer into gameplay, or as non-hockey fans know it as being able to shoot the puck right after someone passes to you. It changed the action in a wonderful way, taking the already special *NHLPA '93* to a new level in *NHL '94*.

Interviewing one of the developers, Michael Brook, for my book *The Minds Behind the Games* made me appreciate the game even more, as *NHL '94*'s creation was as much a work of genius as it was a work of compromise. Every prior NHL game done by EA had fighting in it, and *NHL '94* was the first to lack the fisticuffs. However, it was the first hockey game to have both the NHLPA and NHL license. With zero fighting in the game, Brook and his team were forced to make a huge sacrifice that hurt its appeal to some (the NHL, for some wacky reason, did not want fighting in the game), but it led to the creation of EA and the NHL's longstanding relationship and the series legacy. As a result, you have a game that is unique to its predecessors and the first of many truly great hockey games from EA. – Patrick Hickey Jr.

NHL '95

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Visual Concepts.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



NHL '95 is the fourth game in EA's popular hockey series. The game keeps the angled/overhead vertical view of the action, but this time gamers can participate in an entire eighty-four-game season in Full Season Mode, where you compete for the Hart, Ross, and Vezina trophies. In addition, you are the GM of your team, meaning you can trade and create your own players. Other new features include faster gameplay, fake shots, drop passes, defenders "laying down on D," and new skating, shooting, checking, and goalie animations. There's also a new 2-on-2 Jam mode featuring four players "grinding it out on the ice."

Other modes include Exhibition, which lets you play as any of the regular NHL teams; and Practice, which lets you set up specific game situations. As expected, you can toggle such options as period length, penalties on or off, automatic or manual line changes, and single-game and multi-game (best of seven) playoffs. Full licensing allows for the usage of real teams and players, including such stars as Mike Modano of the Dallas Stars, Mario Lemieux of the Pittsburgh Penguins, and Wayne Gretzky of the Los Angeles Kings. *NHL '95* was also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The game kicks ICE. The larger player animations and the advanced A.I. of the gaming computer make the defense tougher, and it's harder to score. Cheap dekes won't fool the goalie this year. The new trading option and souped-up processing speed make this game rock on the Super NES. The animations are excellent. The game is fun from start to finish." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"This SNES version includes all the new upgrades found in the Genesis cart . . . On the surface the SNES cart looks better, with larger players than the '94 version and a lot more color than in this year's Genesis game, but the scoreboard and menus are harder to read. The sound is a huge disappointment with muffled effects and synthesized music. Like the Genesis cart, the game plays much faster than before and the control is tight and precise." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"After producing what is arguably the greatest hockey game of all time, EA Sports seemed to lose their way. *NHL '95* is more up-tempo but lacks the realism and playability of its predecessor. On one hand I want to give the developers credit for putting a lot of effort into this and not settling for updated rosters. The rink seems larger, the ice is shinier, and you can knock the goals off their moors. The players are rendered in a different style than last year, but I wouldn't say they look any better. The packaging boasts faster gameplay, and that's an understatement. *NHL '95* is *turbo-charged*! I like how hard you can fire the puck at the goal, but it's really hard to move the puck up the ice. Completing passes is like pulling teeth, and you can pretty much forget about orchestrating one-timers." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
I had a love-hate relationship with hockey in my teen years. I attended my brother's varsity games and practices every week, which meant doing schoolwork in the freezing rink and driving home with the windows down to cancel out the sickening odor of gym bags. However, watching New Jersey Devils games, both on TV and in-person, won over my heart. My dad even played goalie for an over-forty league and coached a junior team for a while. Hockey was in my DNA.

NHL '95 was the first sports video game I played, and I was decent at it. You would think I would be a prodigy considering the hours spent listening to high school coaches, but mediocrity was my style. I held my own, spinning around my opponents and scoring like a pro, but I couldn't pass effectively—my disability made it hard to press those buttons fast enough. So I would just skate the same guy around with the puck until I made it to the net; my method was flawed, but it worked well enough until my brother figured out my moves. And that's why I loved *NHL '95*—it allowed me to share hockey moments with my family when the sport was otherwise inaccessible. We could make fun of each other on the digital ice, throw down the virtual gloves, and face-off just like our favorite Devils players. – Erin Hawley

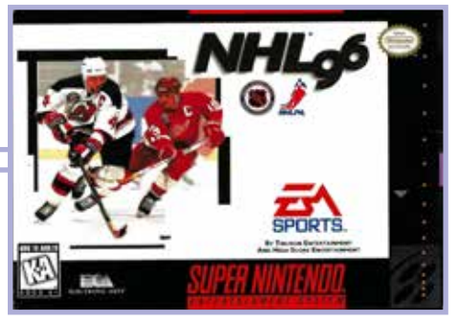
Insider Insight:
If 1993 and 1994 were the years I was largely introduced to video game hockey, 1995 and 1996 were when I became inundated by it. First, my brother Kyle's friend, Ian, gave us his computer game *NHL Hockey*, which was basically *NHL '94* for the PC. Following that, we bought *NHL '95* for the SNES.

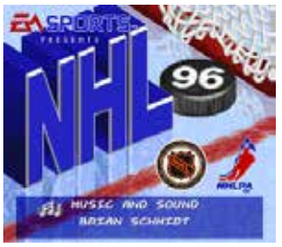
And then we hit the motherlode. Some family friends who owned a movie theater replaced their lobby arcade games and literally gave us one of the old ones: *NHL 2 on 2 Open Ice Challenge*. So, yes, incredibly, during my last couple years of high school, we had an actual arcade machine at our house. It was a phenomenal game—essentially a hockey version of *NBA Jam*—which of course people loved to come over and play. Hence—perhaps quite understandably—*NHL '95* got a bit lost in the shuffle for me during that time, especially since my buddy Roman owned the admittedly superior Sega Genesis version, which we would play at his place.

So, it may sound surprising that of all those games, *NHL '95* on the SNES is the only one I still play to this day. Why? Practically speaking, I no longer own a 1990s-era PC, and my parents placed the arcade game in storage years ago when they moved houses. But games can be emulated, and yet I still enjoy revisiting *NHL '95*. It is nothing too fancy and not significantly different than its 1994 predecessor. But it is a smoother, more refined experience, and tremendously entertaining in short bites. In other words—perfect for a quick fifteen-minute gaming break, which is about all the gameplay time I might have on a typical day as a busy professional and dedicated husband and dad. Perhaps not the *NHL '95* experience I would have anticipated as a teenager, but it works! – Shane Stein

NHL '96

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Tiburon Entertainment/ High Score Productions.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.





Lace up your skates, because EA Sports' popular hockey series continues with *NHL '96*, which includes a variety of fresh features. There are new moves and new ways to score, including give and go, quick stops (by carving your blades into the ice), one-time passing, and the "spin-o-rama," which lets you "freeze the goalie with the ultimate deke." Goalies are tougher, defenders are smarter, and you can get tagged with five-minute major penalties. Players can get multiple injuries. There are new sound effects and music, including public address announcers, chanting crowds, and a rousing (if overly familiar) rendition of the sports anthem "Get Ready for This." An elaborate Stanley Cup ceremony is icing on the proverbial cake, and you can now select from three difficulty levels: novice, intermediate, and expert.

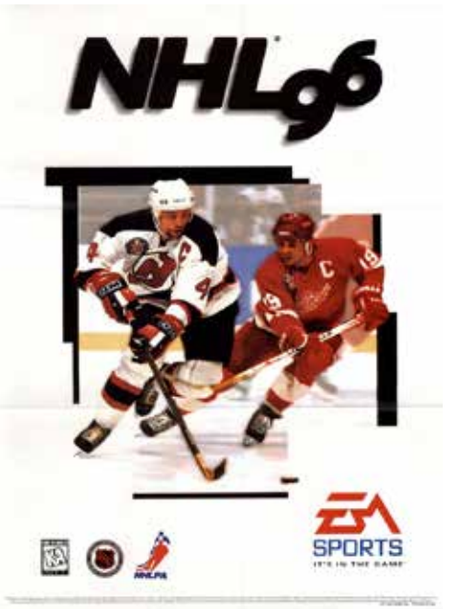
Once again, the action is viewed from an angled/top-down perspective, with gameplay scrolling vertically (and partially left and right) to show the entire hockey rink. Fighting has returned after a two-game layoff, but it is not as much of a factor as in earlier games. Modes of play include Exhibition, Season (complete with best-of-seven playoff series), and Practice, which lets you design plays, run your team through drills, and hone your penalty shot skills. You can toggle period length (5, 10, or 20 minutes), select manual or automatic goalie control, and turn user records, penalties, line changes, and fighting on or off. You can use the default rosters of the NHL teams or play with the trades you have made and players you have created. Time outs, instant replays, body checks, and other such features add to the depth of the game. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Don't get me wrong, this is easily the best Super NES hockey game ever and a great game, it's just not quite up to the level of the Genesis product. If you have both systems, buy the Genesis version. If you only have a Super NES, you still won't be disappointed by this one." – *Game Players* (October 1995)

Notable Quotable:

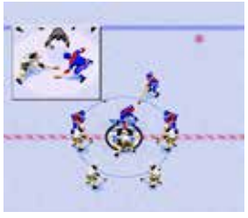
"After the ill-advised debacle that was *NHL '95*, *NHL '96* tried to get the series back on track. The pacing is still fast and furious, but at least there's some semblance of control . . . The biggest selling point for *NHL '96* is probably its new moves assigned to the shoulder buttons. Now you can stop on a dime, perform a nifty 'spin-o-rama' maneuver, or lie down to block a shot on defense . . . The new fighting system looks pretty cool until the winner starts jumping up and down like



a little kid throwing a temper tantrum. *NHL '96*'s player models are much improved and the checking animations are satisfying. It's quite fun to lay out several unsuspecting players on the opposing team—especially *after* the buzzer sounds . . . The action unfolds quickly, and it's easier to transport the puck up the ice as opposed to passing it. Executing a centering pass is no problem, but there's never anybody to receive it! Scoring is tough, unless you are the CPU, who seems to score at will . . . Excellent audio effects include realistic player grunts and a scraping sound when you change directions with your skates . . . Arcade fans will enjoy the pacing of *NHL '96*, but it's not in the same league as *NHL '94*. – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

NHL '97

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Black Pearl Software.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1996.



NHL '97 lets players select from all twenty-six NHL teams, each comprised of actual NHL players, and each rated according to even-strength, power-play, penalty killing, and goal tending. Plus, there are East and West all-star teams. The PlayStation and Saturn versions of the game introduced 3D graphics and motion captured polygonal players, but the SNES game looks and plays almost identical to *NHL '96*. Unlike the Genesis version, which added such features as European teams and a Skills challenge, *NHL '97* is almost exactly like *NHL '96*, but with updated rosters, updated player ratings, and a new coaching menu that allows you to apply different strategies to different lines.

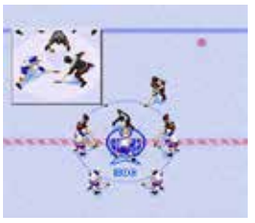
Fans of the series will appreciate the many moves at your command, including give and go, one-timer passes and shots, slap shots, wrist shots, the spin-o-rama, sudden stops, fake shots, drop passes, body checks, poke checks, and the like. Once again, players can turn such options as fighting, penalties, user records, and line changes on or off, and there are three selectable period lengths (5, 10, and 20 minutes) and difficulty levels (novice, intermediate, and expert). Modes of play include Exhibition, Practice, and an eighty-four-game Season, which culminates in the Stanley Cup Finals.

Notable Quotable:

"As the 16-bit era entered its twilight years, EA predictably put its hockey series on auto-pilot, only tweaking it slightly to milk every last penny it could . . . The claim on the box of 'improved gameplay' is debatable. The players are fluid and fast but hard to control. For some reason EA felt obligated to ratchet up the defense and goalie A.I. As a result, it's easy to dislodge the puck and perform bone-crunching checks, but hard to do much on offense! While trying to move the puck up the ice, your player sometimes inexplicably passes the puck *backward*. Good luck trying to thread the needle or locate a trailer on a fast break. Shots on goal tend to be rather weak. It seems like the bulk of the scoring is done by running into the goalie (cheap), or worse yet, scoring on *yourself*. The game does incorporate a few new moves like drop shots and dumping the puck. I always love the cool bells and whistles like the Zamboni during intermissions, penalized players who hack the glass with their sticks, and hats tossed onto the ice after a hat trick. The crowd noise is really subdued in this edition . . . *NHL '97* is a respectable hockey game, but it was clearly produced with a minimum amount of effort." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

NHL '98

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Electronic Arts.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1997.



The final game in the series to be released on 16-bit consoles, *NHL 98* is an officially authorized (by the NHL and the NHLPA) hockey game featuring five modes of play. You, or you and up to four friends, can compete in an Exhibition match, an entire NHL Season, or in three different Practice sessions. There are three difficulty levels to choose from, and you can play with or without penalties, with or without player fatigue, and with or without fights. All twenty-six NHL teams of the time are represented, plus two All-Star teams. You can trade players, release players, sign free agents, keep records of your performance, set all-time records, check out game stats, and watch instant replays. To affect the style of play, you can take on the role of coach and assign various game strategies.

Gameplay is similar to *NHL '97*, but there are some new features, including two different game speeds, enhanced computer A.I., player hot and cold streaks, automatic goalie switching, enhanced penalty awareness (including 2 line pass rule), a more intelligent crowd, hip checks, CPU-generated all-star teams, and of course updated team rosters and player ratings. Also released for the Genesis. The PlayStation and Saturn versions feature such flourishes as 3D graphics, motion-captured players, and color and play-by-play commentary.

Notable Quotable:

"When a hockey game lists 'updated team rosters' and a 'more intelligent crowd' as selling points, it's hard to muster much enthusiasm. The new 'hot and cold' feature is clearly a case of developers looking for something they could add with the least amount of effort. The main menu is sparse, but it does include new skill challenge and shootout modes. These mini-games are good for practice, and they'd be even better if they recorded high scores. Like last year, *NHL 98* is an arcade-minded hockey title with slick visuals and crisp, digitized sounds. It's hard to play offense, but I'm sure some sports fans will relish the challenge. At least shots on goal have some mustard on them. Leafing through the manual I found it interesting to see how the moves have accumulated over the years. You can do all kinds of stuff like dump the puck, fake a shot, or hit the ice to block a shot. You can perform a drop pass, sudden stop, or spin-o-rama move. There's clearly a lot of depth, and I think this game has a little more balance than *NHL '97*. Then again, most gamers didn't even notice since they had already moved onto the next generation of hockey titles—rendered in disappointing 3D!" – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

NHL Stanley Cup

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

NHL Stanley Cup has all twenty-six teams from the National Hockey League (including the expansion Florida Panthers and Anaheim Mighty Ducks) competing for the highest honor in professional hockey, Lord Stanley's Cup. Although real players' names are not used in the game, each team has strengths and weaknesses that correspond to their NHL counterparts. You can substitute for or pull your goalie and institute line changes as you see fit. Gameplay modes consist of Exhibition, Season, and Best of Seven Series. Options include three different period lengths (5, 10, or 20 minutes) and having penalties and line changes turned on or off.

The game mimics real ice hockey, in that you can shoot, pass, or dump the puck, and you can perform hip, shoulder, and poke checks. You can even fake a slap shot and aim your shot on goal to a particular corner of the net. Hockey is an overtly brutal sport, and this game reflects that, but you can be called for numerous penalties, including tripping, cross checking, slashing, roughing, hooking, interference, icing, and offsides.

A special Mode 7 viewpoint gives you a three-dimensional perspective that helps you keep your eyes focused on the puck, the center ice, and the surrounding action. Battery backup lets you save your progress throughout the Stanley Cup playoffs. Other features include season and game statistics, three difficulty levels (junior, NHL, and NHL pro), and the ability to skip games against particular opponents. After the end of each game, a sportscaster gives you a complete wrap-up of the action.

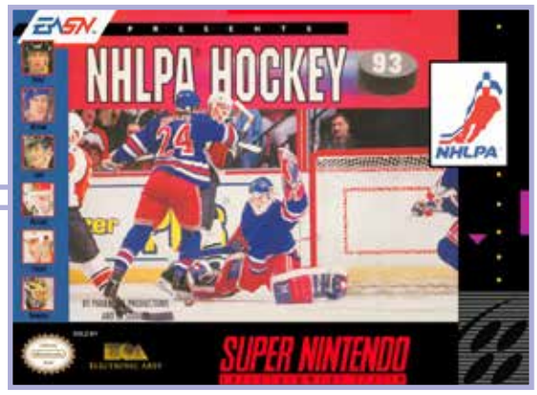
Memories: When the Dallas Stars won the Stanley Cup in 1999, seemingly everyone in the area was excited, including my family, who lived (and still lives) in neighboring Fort Worth. North Texas is not really a hockey town—it is Dallas Cowboys country—but during that magical run, Dallas Stars mania was everywhere, from restaurant marquees, to billboards, to watercooler conversations. When the Stars brought the Stanley Cup to a Texas Rangers home game we attended, my young son said, "Look, it's Stanley's Cup!" Despite the "Stanley's Cup" in the title, *NHL Stanley Cup* does not take home the trophy when it comes to hockey games of the era—that belongs to *NHL'94*.

Notable Quotable:
"Its rough-around-the-edges quality and lack of an NHLPA license sends this hockey sim down to the minor leagues. And Mode 7 hinders the gameplay! Disappointing." – *Game Players* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Playing this hockey game today is a nauseating experience, and I can't imagine it was much better in 1993 . . . the Super Nintendo's trademark Mode 7 rotation and scaling effects create a constantly shifting view of the action. It looks like the entire rink is spinning in outer space . . . the stilted animation, pixelated sprites, and constant rotation make it hard to find the puck, much less execute a crisp pass or target the corner of the goal. You can only pass to the player with the icon over his head, and switching players on defense is maddening. The special moves look horrific, and when you perform a 'hip check' it looks like you're trying to rub your butt on an opponent! That really stinks! *Stanley Cup*'s sound effects are equally weak, with the same constipated 'grunt' sounds over and over again. The lone highlight of the game is the intro, which shows an over-the-shoulder cinematic of a player approaching the goal on a fast break. Too bad you won't see anything that impressive in the actual game." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

NHLPA Hockey 93

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Electronic Arts.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



The follow-up to *NHL Hockey* for the Genesis, *NHLPA Hockey 93*, as the title indicates, was endorsed by the National Hockey League Players Association, meaning the cart includes more than 500 real NHL players, including such stars as Jeremy Roenick and Patrick Roy. City names correspond to each squad, but the game lacks NHL licensing, meaning real team names and logos are not used. The game plays a lot like *NHL Hockey* (which lacked real player names), but has more than twenty new features, including battery backup, player fights (moves include head shot, body punch, and hold), injuries (which can knock players out of a period or a game), accurate player stats, signature moves, a tougher computer opponent, faster goalies that can now dive, an edit lines feature, a crowd noise meter that affects how well your team plays, a pane of glass behind the goals that can be shattered, and most valuable player awards at the end of games.

You can challenge the computer or a friend, or you can team up with a friend against the computer in a Regular Season game. You can only play the Playoffs modes (Continue Playoffs, New Playoffs, and Best of 7) by yourself, and there is no option for playing a full season. You can set period length at 5, 10, or 20 minutes, and you can turn penalties (holding, roughing, tripping, hooking, and the like) and line changes on or off. The game includes replays, and Ron Barr comments on the action via text. The action is viewed from a top-down perspective, with gameplay scrolling vertically (and partially left and right) to show the entire rink. In the Genesis version, injured players can bleed on the ice following an injury. Ah, the oft-bloodless SNES. Followed by *NHL '94*.

Fun Fact: In *Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), the Genesis version of *NHLPA Hockey 93* was named the twentieth greatest video game of all time, one notch behind *Galaga* and just ahead of *Gran Turismo*.

Notable Quotable:
"A rather fine ice hockey simulation and very addictive game." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"*NHLPA Hockey 93* was an auspicious start, laying a foundation with the steady vertical scrolling camera angle, quick responsive

controls, and subsequent fast gameplay. But they didn't quite get it together yet. They were definitely on the verge of something, though." – SNES Drunk (YouTube)

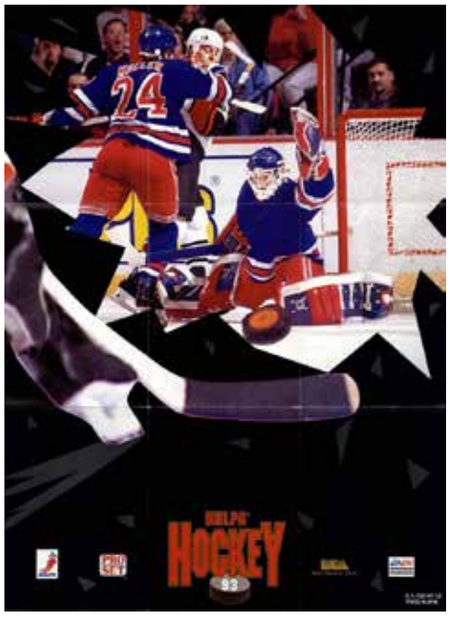
Notable Quotable:

"There were no one-timers, which meant that if you wanted to score you had to get creative. Plays had to be set up, shots chosen carefully, and specific players used in the roles for which they were best suited. Scoring goals in *NHLPA Hockey 93* was hard. Unless, of course, you just used one of the many glitchy moves that seemed to work all the time, like piling into the crease, doing that wraparound move, or flipping the puck in so it bounced off the goalie's head and then scoring into the empty net while he was stunned . . . you could make a strong case that it had the best fighting implementation of any hockey game ever . . . It wasn't just about button mashing—there was a timing to it, and the key was to get into a rhythm (or, failing that, trap the other guy up against the boards or the net). It was easy to lose, even to the computer." – Sean McIndoe (grantland.com)

Insider Insight:

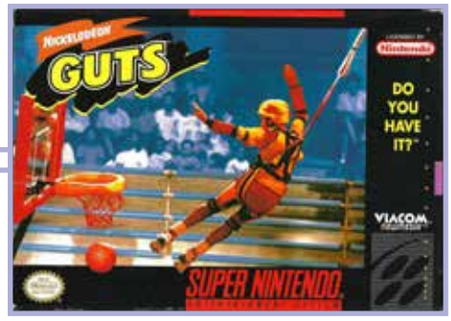
NHLPA Hockey 93 is a special game because it allowed me to play—for the first time—with my favorite hockey players and teams (actual team names were not used, but corresponding city names got the point across fine). It also allowed me to spend countless hours with my father in front of the TV. However, my poor father quickly realized that his nine-year-old namesake was an animal, a slap shot savant, a cross-checking cretin—*das wunderkind* if you will. So he stopped playing. When I would go to bed, I could swear I heard the game in action, but out of fear, I would never run into the living room after I had been put to bed. I was a good kid, after all. And why would dad play without me? Why? That son of a son was preparing for war.

After a few weeks my father finally challenged me again, and that game is one that is forged in my memory forever. It was the Islanders (me) versus Chicago Blackhawks (Dad), and he got out to a quick 3–0 lead in the first period. His line of Jeremy Roenick, Steve Larmer, and Michel Goulet was all over me. He was faster, more aggressive, and smarter than ever. I knew I had to step it up. I then went on to score seven goals in a row: five with my childhood hero, Pierre Turgeon, and then knocked Roenick out of the game with a vicious check from Steve Thomas at center ice. My father was pissed. You could basically see the steam coming out of his ears. In a rather obtuse move—one I would later regret—I proceeded to shake my rump and jump up and down, proclaiming to the world that I was indeed a hockey god. When I turned around, my father, without saying a word, made an impact. With his *Donkey Kong*-sized hands, he broke the SNES controller in half and walked away. It was not until *NHL '94* came out a year later that we continued the rivalry. – Patrick Hickey Jr.



Nickelodeon GUTS

Publisher: Viacom New Media.
Developer: GameTek.
Game Type: Sports/Extreme, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Sort of an *American Gladiators* for the acne set, *Nickelodeon GUTS*, which is based on the Nickelodeon TV show of the same name (1992–1996), lets you choose one of eight competitors to take part in three types of extreme athletic events: Elastic Sports, Action Sports, and the Aggro Crag. In Elastic Sports, you will strap yourself into a harness hooked to a long elastic cord, jumping and bouncing around while trying to make shots. There are three types of Elastic games: Slam Dunk, which is a basketball game; Attack, which is a lacrosse competition; and Spirals, which has you throwing a football through a hanging tire.

Action Sports has you running, crawling, climbing, and jumping through a series of obstacle courses to reach the finish line as quickly as you can. Play is divided into two sections: Basic Training, which incorporates swinging ropes, suspended ropes, poles, water, slides, and punching bags into the action; and the Tornado Run, which is similar to Basic Training, but adds earthquake platforms and water jets to the mix.

Finally, the Aggro Crag is a mountain run that combines many of the obstacles from Action Sports with new obstacles, such as confetti cannons, smoke jets, and moving platforms. As you work your way up the Aggro Crag, you must hit each of five activators before you can activate the last one at the top of the mountain. You can play alone or challenge a friend to alternating (Aggro Crag and Action Sports) or simultaneous (Elastic Sports) competition. You can enter a single event or play the GUTS Show, which lets you train in two Action Sports and two randomly selected Elastic Sports. If you score enough points in the Show, you will advance to the Aggro Crag. The intro to the game features black-and-white digitized stills of the competitors and certain scenes from the show.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are merely average, mainly because the repetitive side-view lacks variety. The medium-sized sprites and digitized athletes look cool, if not very detailed, but the background audience never moves . . . The sound in this game lacks guts. The music is pretty basic; you may want to turn it down before it gets tiresome. And the contestants make no noise, even when they fall. At least the roar of the crowd in Elastic Sports is realistic, as is the scorekeeper's voice. At first, the controls are difficult because each event has a different challenge for you to master. Younger gamers and those with little patience might have a hard time, but practice eventually makes perfect." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Something tells me this game wasn't created to be so difficult; it's just that the controls are so frighteningly bad even the easiest task becomes a chore. For example, why is it so damned difficult to grab onto a rope or pull? The aerial events are equally frustrating . . . One thing that is shockingly missing from this game are the show's hosts . . . Sure, Mo makes a pixelated appearance, but I always wanted to hear Mo recap the scores at the end of each round . . . Sometimes the most frustrating games can be the most satisfying . . . After playing through this terrible, terrible game and finally conquering the Crag, it felt extremely satisfying to see that piece of the Crag in Jamal's hands." – TheGameHeroes (YouTube)

Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing

Publisher: GameTek.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software.
Game Type: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Viewed from an immersive, in-the-cockpit perspective, *Nigel Mansell's World Championship Racing* lets gamers race against eleven rivals on sixteen twisting, turning, international tracks: South Africa, Mexico, Brazil, Spain, San Marino, Monaco, Canada, France, Britain, Germany, Hungary, Belgium, Italy, Portugal, Japan, and Australia. Modes of play include: Driving Practice, which lets you work on the basics; Race Circuit, which has you run a practice race (with a qualifying session) on the course of your choice; Full Season, a sixteen-race marathon that lets you save your progress using passwords; and Mansell's Advice, where the British racer (his digitized face, anyway) offers players audible advice and praise.

The game features a variety of simulation elements, including pit stops (for changing tires), variable weather conditions (sunny, overcast, and rainy), automatic or manual transmission, three types of tires (hard, soft, and rain), and three wing angles. To keep from running into roadside barriers like poles and signs, you should slow down during turns. Also released for the Game Boy and NES. The Genesis version features a less immersive third-person perspective, where you view your car from behind. Released as *Nigel Mansell's F-1 Challenge* in Japan.

Fun Fact: Nigel Mansell won the 1992 Formula One World Championship and the 1993 CART Indy Car World Series. In 2005, he was inducted into the International Motorsports Hall of Fame.

Notable Quotable:
"Brilliant in most respects, but ultimately limited by the lack of a two-player option. Lone racers will get a lot out of it, though, especially with the number of options and tracks." – *Total!!* (October 1993)

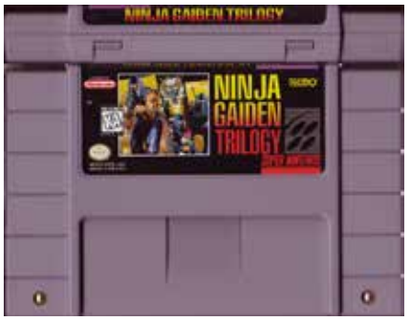
Notable Quotable:
"A great racing game which holds its head proudly above the opposition. There's no two-player mode, but then you wouldn't want to share it anyway. It's quick, and so should you be in snapping this one up." – *GamesMaster* (September 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The first thing that struck me about this game is how fluid the animation is . . . the game feels like it's running at some impossibly high framerate . . . the inclusion of sponsor logos both on the car and the track helps add to the realism . . . the cars sound like they're battery operated. The engines have too much of a high-pitched whine." – Classic Gaming Quarterly (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"The SNES [version] uses a couple of nice Mode 7 effects as window dressing (the globe is excellent) and manages some good scaling effects with bit-mapped graphics on the track at high speed. I was disappointed that the Monaco track didn't accurately reflect the fact that the actual track is on city streets . . . speech effects in the tutorial are hard to decipher. There's no speech in the NES version, but it's not missed . . . almost more of a simulator than a game, appropriate more for those who're looking for a pure racetrack experience as opposed to bigger-than-life entertainment." – *VideoGames* (September 1993)

Ninja Gaiden Trilogy

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1995.



Ninja Gaiden Trilogy features three NES classics on one cartridge. In the original *Ninja Gaiden*, gamers guide ninja Ryu Hayabusa as he runs, crouches, climbs (ladders), flips, and jumps (including wall-spring jumps and wall-spring climbing jumps) his way through six levels of caves, icy cliffs, temples, and other venues of non-stop action. Ryu dispatches enemies with quick sword thrusts, and he can slash lamps and other objects to reveal such pickups as points, spiritual strength, and the following weapons: throwing stars, windmill throwing stars, time freezes, a jump and slash technique, and an invincible fire wheel that rotates around him.

Like the first game, *Ninja Gaiden II: The Dark Sword of Chaos* features ample hack-and-slash action, supplemented by plenty of platforming, dramatic music, and sweeping, anime-style cutscenes. Gameplay is similar—defeat enemies with quick sword thrusts, turn flips, and jump off walls and over fire, spikes, and other obstacles—but this time Ryu can throw fireballs, climb on walls (as opposed to just ladders), and split his body into three for a multiple attack (a cool and powerful maneuver). In addition, the game features more detailed backgrounds, new characters (including Ashtar, who wields the titular Sword of Chaos), and some fresh (if frustrating) environmental hazards, such as mountain winds that can blow Ryu into deadly chasms.

Ninja Gaiden III: The Ancient Ship of Doom begins with a cutscene of a Ryu impersonator sending the beautiful Irene Lew plummeting off a cliff, effectively setting the stage for the final game in the original NES trilogy. Players once again guide Ryu as he runs, jumps, flips, and battles his way through nicely illustrated levels (jungles, caves, and desert) and a variety of enemies (lots of robots and monsters in this case). The weapons of the previous two games return, but Ryu does have some new attack methods, including vacuum wave art, which is a blade that can be thrown up and down, and a dragon spirit sword upgrade, which increases the range of Ryu's standard attack. Ryu can also attack while hanging from walls and move hand-over-hand via pipes and jungle ivy. For the *Ninja Gaiden Trilogy*, *Ninja Gaiden III* now has unlimited continues (as in the Japanese Famicom version).

Unfortunately, this is a lazily produced collection. The games remain enjoyable and challenging, but the package could have been so much more. The graphics were barely updated (there are more colors and no flickering), the end credits are missing, the lightning in level 3-1 of the second game is gone, and the backgrounds for the desert level in game three are totally non-scrolling. Passwords are a welcome addition in this now hard-to-find cartridge, but the controls (B for attacking and A for jumping) are awkward and cannot be reconfigured. There is slow-down as well. Perhaps the most bewildering flaw is that the highly memorable music has been rearranged and otherwise altered for the worse. To see how a compilation of older games should be done, check out *Super Mario All-Stars*.

Fun Fact: *Ninja Gaiden Trilogy* was included as a bonus unlockable in *Ninja Gaiden* (2004), a third-person, 3D hack-and-slash game for the Xbox.

Notable Quotable:

"Is there any reason NOT to own this triple collection consisting of some of the 8-bit era's best action/platform titles? This SNES cart increases visual detail, remixes the music . . . Unless you're a purist, this is the best way to play these games . . . Each of these games offers the same brutal difficulty they were known for. Nothing has been left out or tweaked for the sake of making it

accessible. There are no extra powers, magic, or levels . . . The simple gameplay of the original became a classic because of the engine, giving players an unmatched sense of control with a meager two buttons. The sequel added to the repertoire, beefing up Ryu Hayabusa's power and a wide variety of stages to run through. The third added even more, this time letting players feel like professional gamers as they bounce and climb along walls. There is also room to praise the soundtracks, pushing the NES's sound chip with incredible bass, and here on the SNES, it's better, at least in a few stages. The extra punch provided by the extra available channels doesn't sound different to the untrained ear. Those who adore the NES soundtracks will find these upgrades a magnificent improvement. Tracks have, however, been changed. That's unacceptable. Purists angry about the soundtrack will have only a few problems with the graphics as the sprites remain the same size, and the few added colors are barely noticeable. This isn't a cart to push the Super NES, though. It's about having three of the best NES games ever made in one place. Aside from the soundtrack issues, it's an excellent set and convenience at its best." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight: *Super Mario All-Stars* knocked my socks off. The way they took the original NES masterpieces and transformed them into gorgeous SNES games was amazing. The new sprites, scrolling backgrounds, gorgeous re-imaginings of the music—it all landed flawlessly. So, naturally, when I heard about *Ninja Gaiden Trilogy*, I was pumped. The first two *Ninja Gaiden* games on NES were some of my all-time favorites. They already looked and sounded so good, my imagination went wild trying to picture what SNES versions would be like. Plus, I had never played *Ninja Gaiden III* before, so I was even getting a brand new game out of the deal.

I walked into my local Electronics Boutique, plunked down my hard-earned cash, and tore through the instruction manual on the drive home. My hands were positively trembling when I popped that cartridge in, but when I flicked that power switch, much to my horror, I was treated to some of the most putrid, fart-sounding "guitar" music I had ever heard. Undeterred, I fired up the first game, and I could not believe what I was seeing. Somehow, they managed to make nearly every aspect of the visuals and sound from the original NES games worse. Like, painfully worse. Sure, the games still played like a dream, and there was some new shading added to things, but there was no new animation, no scrolling backgrounds, the fade-in effects were gone in the cut scenes, and the music . . . what did they do to the music? And to top it all off, it turned out that I did not like *Ninja Gaiden III* very much, either.

Ninja Gaiden Trilogy is a fascinating curiosity and a textbook example of how *not* to remake NES games on SNES, but I do not recommend playing it. – Kris Randazzo

The Ninja Warriors

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: Natsume.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

As one of three large androids, each programmed with "all the ancient skills of ninja warriors," you must defeat an army and bring down Banglar, a tyrant who rules the nation with an iron fist. Each of the androids can attack, crouch, block, and perform special moves. A slow, hulking brute who can't jump (but who can dash), Ninja fights with his fists, nunchakas, throws, knee slams, spinning flames, and elbow attacks. Wielding a sword for stabbing and slashing enemies, Kunoichi is a balanced (in terms of speed and strength) female who can also shove, stab, and do flip kicks and jump kicks. Armed with extendable blades and spikes, Kamiatachi can't grab enemies (unlike the other two ninjas), but he can do spiral attacks, flip kicks, straight kicks, and jumping attacks.

The beat-'em-up action is straightforward as you walk along a single plane, battling soldiers, punks, snipers, robots, masked ninjas, and other enemies (who approach from the front and behind), including those who emit flames and attack by slashing, clawing, or sliding into you. There are also hazards, such as bombs that drop from the skies and large fans that turn on and off intermittently. Most of the game, which includes boss battles, takes place in buildings, parking garages, city ruins, industrial areas, and the like, but you will also enter the great outdoors, where you will see snowy trees and mountains in the background.

Called *The Ninja Warriors Again* in Japan, *The Ninja Warriors* is based on Taito's arcade game of the same name, which began development in 1987, but was released in 1988. Like *Darius* and *Rastan Saga Episode 3*, the arcade version of *The Ninja Warriors* featured an extra wide display. However, the SNES port is more diverse, adding finishing moves, more variance in the levels, and the ability to throw such things as computers, safes, and motorcycles. There is also a meter that builds up over time that lets you unleash a "blaster" move which affects all the onscreen enemies. Absent from the home version are shuriken attacks, visible battle damage, and, worst of all, the two-player co-op mode—an important element for games of this genre. Compared to the Japanese Super Famicom version, the SNES game lacks the green blood spattering that occurs when you hit enemies.

Notable Quotable:

"A scrolling action game that's better than most because of its steady progression of varied and increasingly difficult foes. The stages are long enough for you to feel like you've accomplished something." – *Game Players* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"It's easy to be hard on the game since it's so simple. It doesn't really seem like a sequel either, more of a remake with new features. Still, if the gameplay is engaging, none of that really matters. *Ninja Warriors* is well worth tracking down if you enjoy some mindless action and you can ignore some of the small flaws. You won't need to think much, which makes it a great stress reliever and time killer. What more do you need?" – Matt Paprocki (digitpress.com)

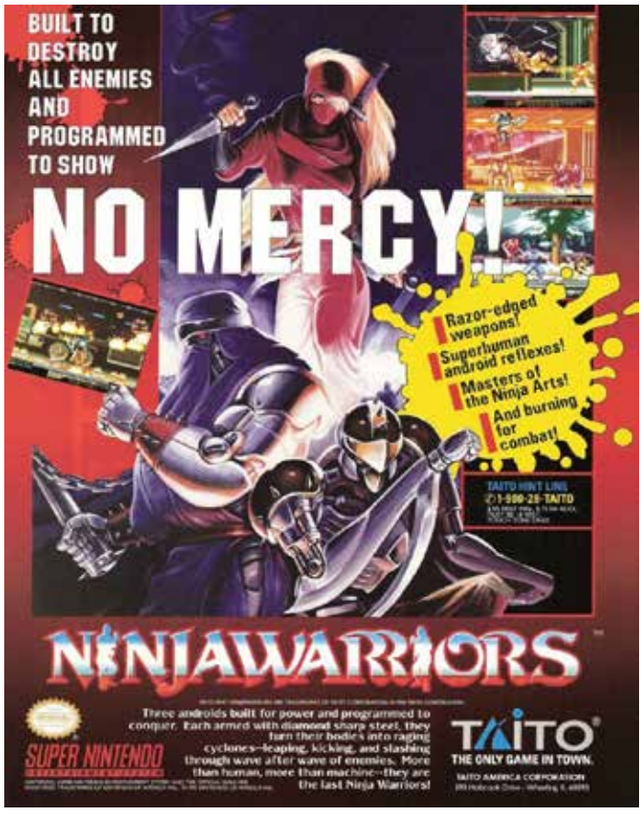
Insider Insight: T

he original coin-op version of *The Ninja Warriors* was very impressive. Three glorious monitors stitched together to make a very panoramic view. I personally adored Sega's *Shinobi*, and *The Ninja Warriors* was like *Shinobi* on steroids! I wanted the game badly, but was worried about how the triple-wide layout would appear on the much thinner television I had at home.

When *The Ninja Warriors* finally dropped seven years later on the Super Nintendo, the game received a huge overhaul. The SNES version unfortunately omitted the two-player simultaneous play, but other than that, the game was so much better. The sprite graphics were so beautiful I almost forgot that the image was a third of its arcade counterpart. Plus, it had three extra levels to boot!

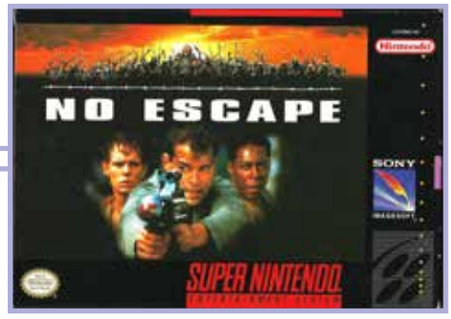
The game's antagonist was named Bangler, and my friends and I would always giggle and make some smart-aleck remark when he appeared in the game. He did not seem so scary after mocking his moniker. Of course, the revolutionary leader's name, Mulk, was good for a hoot, too! Heck, we couldn't even pronounce the android ninja's names: Kamaitachi and Kunoichi. We butchered those Japanese names again and again.

While the game itself was excellent, I made a game within the game. Playing *The Ninja Warriors* involved a lot of shurikens. So many, in fact, that it was nearly impossible to keep count of them all. That is what I did. I vividly remember trying to count all the shurikens as I threw them at enemies in the game . . . but it was impossible to keep track of the rapidly growing number. As the action grew more furious I always became distracted and lost count. – Michael Thomasson



No Escape

Publisher: Sony Imagesoft.
Developer: BITS Studios.
Game Type: Adventure/ Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.



Based on the dreadful 1994 movie, *No Escape* casts you in the role of Captain J. T. Robbins, who was played by Ray Liotta in the feature film. The objective is to escape Absolom Island, a sprawling, frequently lethal penitentiary. You have heard through the grapevine that there is a place on the island called the village. The village is where the civilized inmates live. You want to go there at all costs, because it is your only hope for escape.

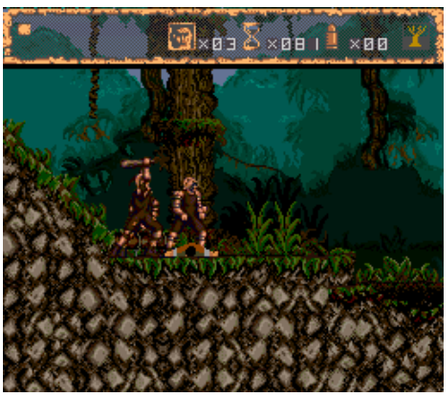
You begin the game in the thick of the jungle, with nothing more than the clothes on your back and years of combat training. The action is of the scrolling, side-view, non-linear variety, with your character jumping on ledges and punching and kicking such bad guys as Mole Men, Motorheads, Tree Dwellers, and Techno Warriors, who attack with fists, darts, blowguns, knives, and other weapons. You must also avoid such obstacles as falling bags of sand, bursts of hot steam, spears in the ground, tree limbs, electric traps, and spiked pits. You can talk to certain prisoners who will aid you in your escape, but be wary of the violent ones.

Throughout the game there are more than 150 objects for you to find, including an engine distributor, a hacksaw, tin snips, a rusty compass, shafts of wood, bolts, butane gas, an empty butane lantern, bulbs, and an iron crowbar. More than ninety of the objects can be combined to create new weapons, traps, and tools, such as a crossbow, sticks of dynamite, or woodwork tools. Unfortunately, this only adds to the game's tedium and frustration. A mapping system lets you enter the next destination you would like to explore, but it is often hard to know where to go or what to do next.

The aforementioned village is a temporary safe haven where you can gain information and trade for new objects. The other four locations are filled with traps and enemies. Each of the sectors has multiple sub-sections to explore. Only when you have successfully completed a sub-sector can you move on to the next sub-sector in that area. Characters are rendered via rotoscoped animation using real actors, but the game looks and plays very poorly. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The intro is actually kind of cool and makes you think you may be in for an obscure treat, but then the actual gameplay fires up . . . I think they were going for some sort of combination of the style of *Flashback* with a traditional side-scrolling beater/shooter/platformer, but they ended up just totally failing at play control and level design. There's a ridiculous delay between pressing a button and performing an action, but the enemies bum-rush you and do damage upon touching you, always giving them a massive advantage. The game is just such a cumbersome pain to play and has such godawful control that nothing else about it really matters. Basically your typical half-assed movie-to-game shovelware. Avoid." – Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)



Insider Insight: One day during the mid-'90s, I rented *No Escape* because nothing else was available other than sports games. The back of the game packaging looked decent, and I knew it was based on a recent movie, so I figured I would give it a chance. Fifteen seconds in is about how far I got in the first level before I was killed. With a heavy sigh I tried again, only to find I did not fare much better. A quick return to the main menu told me this was the only difficulty setting. There were no options at all—just a title screen telling you to start the game.

I am not even sure I made it ten minutes before *No Escape* found its way back into the rental box, resulting in another weekend of my playing the games I already owned (and had played a thousand times over), all because the rental was just that bad. In fact, if I were to ever say there was a Super Nintendo game that I hated the most, it would be *No Escape*. I did not mind *Lester the Unlikely* and would even rather play *Bill Laimbeer's Combat Basketball*. *No Escape* was *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* on the NES level of bad.

As with all the games I played in my younger days, I recently returned to *No Escape* to see if I could now do what my teenage self did not have the patience for. Unfortunately, the frustration kicked in just as it did all those years ago, proving that there truly is no escaping this crappy game. – Zoe K. Howard

Nobunaga's Ambition

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Set in feudal Japan (circa 1467–1600), when the nation was divided into feudal states, *Nobunaga's Ambition* requires players—as upgradeable *daimyos* (warlords)—to unify seventeen or fifty (depending on the scenario) fiefs into one sovereign nation. Daimyos are rated according to age, health, ambition, luck, charm, and IQ. As the game wears on, these values change depending on how events transpire. Each daimyo army consists of three infantry units, one cavalry unit, and a rifles unit. There are four scenarios: Battle for the East (1560), Daimyo Power Struggles (1560), Ambition Untamed (1571), and Road Towards Unification (1582).

Gameplay involves cultivating land, buying and selling rice, borrowing gold from merchants, hiring soldiers, giving gold and rice to peasants and soldiers (this increases their loyalty and wealth and your charm), deploying and training troops (training raises their skill level), bribing enemies, forming pacts with other daimyos, getting married to other daimyos' daughters, dealing with military revolts and peasant uprisings, sending ninja spies to persuade the people of a rival daimyo to betray their lord, attacking other fiefs, building dams, destroying enemies' river banks to lower flood control, altering tax rates, and much more. There are numerous menus to navigate for entering commands, and the chess-like gameplay has players maneuvering five army units across a grid-like playfield. The terrain includes plains, hills, mountains, water, towns, and castles.

Nobunaga's Ambition was first released in Japan in 1983 on the PC. Also released for the Game Boy, Genesis, and NES.

Notable Quotable:

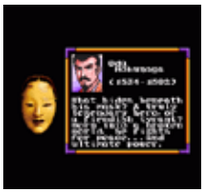
"This game's great for brainiac number crunchers, which makes it an acquired taste for everyone else . . . the swift computer blows the doors off other Koei games in terms of speed . . . When it's time for war, *Nobunaga's* becomes an entertaining game of strategy and tactics . . . an excellent grid combat system . . . The graphics and sounds are in the Koei tradition: sparse but sharp. However, *Nobunaga's* contains even less animation and fewer graphics than usual. The sounds are similarly lean, dominated by crystal clear but repetitive Asian-sounding music." – *GamePro* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Gameplay that is fun and addictive to this day. Although later games in the series added more depth, this original game is still worth checking out for newcomers to the series because it offers so many choices that you can easily get 100 hours of play . . . More importantly, there is no easier gateway into the world of Koei than *Nobunaga's Ambition*. In comparison, games such as *Genghis Khan II* feature a similar game design but with vastly more options to overwhelm you if you don't have some idea of what to expect . . . It offers accessibility and enough variety to provide the ideal entry point for anyone who thinks this just might be the niche for them." – Spencer McIlvaine (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the SNES game downloaded to the Wii Virtual Console.

Nobunaga's Ambition: Lord of Darkness

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Released after *Nobunaga no Yabō* (1983, Japanese PC), *Nobunaga's Ambition*, and *Nobunaga's Ambition II*, *Nobunaga's Ambition: Lord of Darkness* (simply called *Lord of Darkness* on the box) is the fourth game in the *Nobunaga* series, but only the third one to have been localized in English. As a young daimyo (warlord) with ambitions of your own, you must plot strategies to prevent Lord Nobunaga—who uses castle sieges, joint attacks, day and night battles, ninja infiltrations, and other warring tactics—from taking control of Japan.

To repel these attacks and defeat Nobunaga, you should surround yourself with the strongest of the 300 generals, strengthen your territories through new technologies, and supply your armies with the latest weapons. Proper management of the military, the population, and your supplies are keys to success, and you should remember to keep your citizens well-fed, your warriors versed in tea ceremonies, and your messengers prepared to make alliances with neighboring states. The action takes place during Japan's civil war of the sixteenth century, when the nation was divided into feudal states, each ruled by a daimyo. You will battle your enemies on the open plains, at sea, and within castle walls.

A number of sequels followed, including *Nobunaga's Ambition: Rise to Power* and *Nobunaga's Ambition: Iron Triangle* for the PlayStation 2.

Notable Quotable:

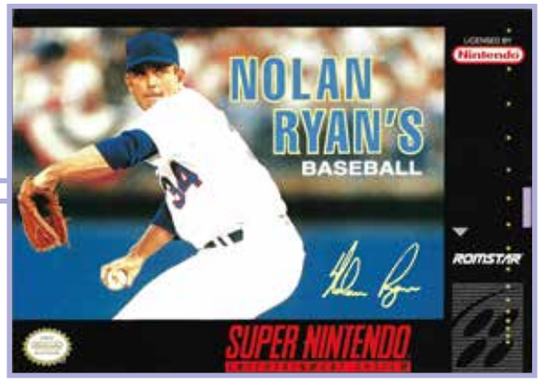
"Koei games are Koei games—you know that you're in for strategy-filled gaming sessions as soon as you load one up. This isn't one of the best games available, though, and it quickly gets frustrating." – *Game Players* (May 1994)

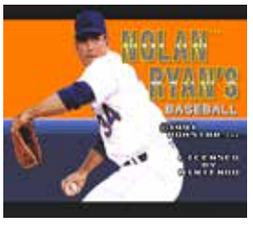
Notable Quotable:

"*Nobunaga's Ambition: Lord of Darkness* is the pinnacle of SNES strategy. Its predecessor, *Nobunaga's Ambition*, was indeed a good game, but lacked the options and size that this one delivers. This is definitely the better choice . . . The graphics leave much to be desired, but a Koei fan and strategy/war game fan won't really complain about it. The map of the area divides the country into 48 different provinces which are differentiated by different colors. The command screen features a portrait of the ruler of that particular province, whether it be the actual ruler or an assigned governor. It's not flashy, but definitely to the point." – Nintendo Classic RPG Gaming (snesrpggaming.weebly.com)

Nolan Ryan's Baseball

Publisher: Romstar.
Developer: Affect.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.





Produced during Nolan Ryan's noteworthy stint with the Texas Rangers—he pitched his seventh no-hitter during this time—*Nolan Ryan's Baseball* disappoints with its short, stubby, unrealistically portrayed players. Despite the distinctly American license, the game has an anime style. Adding to the disappointment are slow fielders and base runners, weak throws from the outfield, average gameplay, and below average graphics. On the plus side play control is decent, there are animated close-ups and digitized voice effects, and gamers can pick free agents, trade players, select a manager, and create customized players, each with alterable running speed, stamina, and other attributes.

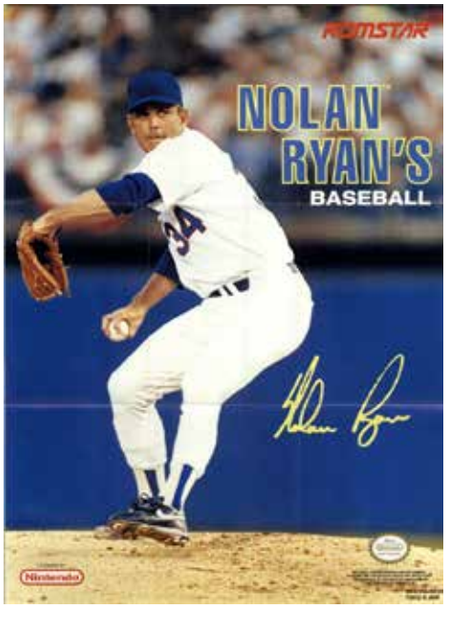
Modes of play include Demo, Supervisory, Assist, and Standard, the last comprising Single Game and Pennant. Pennant mode features twelve different teams (six per league) battling for the championship, and you can save your progress via battery backup. Pitchers can move around the mound and throw a variety of pitches, and the action is viewed from behind the pitcher whether you are batting or pitching. The view switches to overhead after the ball is hit into play. Limited voice effects include "strike," "out," "safe," and the like. Overall, the game is not worthy of its license. In Japan the game is called *Super Stadium*.

Fun Fact: Inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in 1999, Nolan Ryan threw a Major League record 5,714 strikeouts in his twenty-seven years of play. He also threw seven no-hitters (three more than any other pitcher) and twelve one-hitters (tied for the record with Bob Feller).

Memories: I have always been more of a basketball fan than a baseball fan, but our family went to a lot of Texas Rangers games at the old Arlington Stadium, which before they tore it down was situated between Dallas and Fort Worth. The Rangers rarely made it to the playoffs, and to this day have never won a World Series (though they got close in 2011), but we had a lot of fun going to games. We were especially excited when the team got Nolan Ryan, who came over from the Houston Astros in 1989. It is a shame *Nolan Ryan's Baseball* pales in comparison to Ken Griffey Jr.'s pair of SNES games, which you can read about in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*.

Notable Quotable:

"*Nolan Ryan's Baseball* is an underplayed SNES game that is decent if you get into it, though it has some major drawbacks . . . I found it hard to strike out players. In fielding, the controls are self-explanatory. The worst part is that the fielders run slower than the base runners. Batting is fun, but there is a major glitch in the game. Maybe not a glitch but a programming mistake. If you crowd the plate, more often than not you will get hit by the pitch—over and over again. You can run up the score this way." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)



Nosferatu

Publisher: SETA U.S.A.
Developer: SETA Corporation.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

On a quest to defeat legendary vampire Nosferatu and rescue fair maiden Erin, martial arts expert Kyle, played by you, must walk, run, jump, slide, hang, punch, thrust, and kick his way through an atmospheric castle (and sometimes outside said castle), battling a menagerie of creatures such as zombies, apes, gargoyles, the Wolf Man, the Mummy, and the Frankenstein monster. He will encounter numerous obstacles during his quest, including dropping gates, wall spikes, ceiling swords, dropping skeletons, floor saws, floor spikes, flying chairs, fire-breathing lions, and dropping weights.

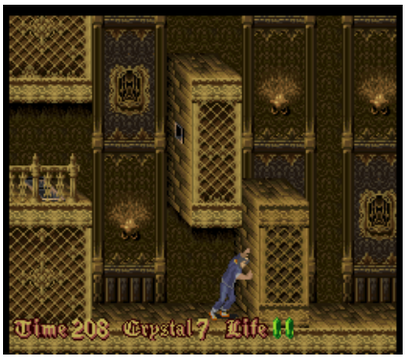
Kyle, who climbs up on platforms similar to the protagonist in *Prince of Persia*, lacks weaponry, but he can pull off such moves as a flying roundhouse, spinning back kick, and uppercut. By grabbing power crystals, he can acquire new skills and combos, including jab, power jab, knee jab, low kick, high kick, body kick, and power punch. Certain monsters drop crystals after you defeat them, but beware the Gem Eater, who will steal your gems with his long tongue. To proceed through certain areas, Kyle must push walls and find hidden floor and wall switches to open doors. Kyle can also grab hour glasses to extend his time remaining in sub-levels and main levels. He should be careful not to drop down too far or he will die. There are six main levels and fourteen sub levels in all, along with many hidden rooms.

Notable Quotable:

"You would think you could find some weapons you could use—never . . . The graphics are awesome . . . the animation is so smooth and detailed . . . awesome design . . . the controls are a little frustrating . . . music is not good . . . Naming it '*Nosferatu*' is very interesting because the only time I ever really hear 'Nosferatu' used in connection with Dracula is the movie from 1922." – James "The Angry Video Game Nerd" Rolfe (via Cinemassacre YouTube channel)

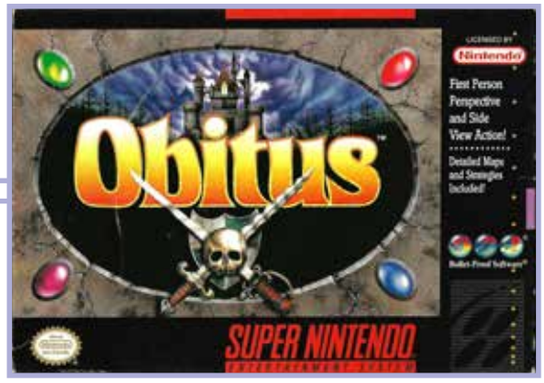
Notable Quotable:

"A nice variety of monsters to beat up, ranging from the traditional movie monsters (Frankenstein, Mummy, etc.) to some truly bizarre original creations . . . the second boss is a pair of gorillas! The game lacks tension, although there are occasional surprises like falling corpses and hands that grab you from under the floor. Too many traps litter the later levels, and if you don't fall into a spiked pit on your own, you're likely to be pushed into one . . . the creatures look great but the castle walls start to get boring after a few levels . . . The controls are less than responsive, making it difficult to enter certain doorways or get off a punch in time. The audio is weak, with sparse sound effects and music that's uneven in quality." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Obitus

Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software.
Developer: Psygnosis.
Game Type: Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.



First released for the Amiga, the Atari ST, and MS-DOS systems in 1991, *Obitus* was ported to the SNES in 1994. In this game you portray Wil Mason, a medieval history lecturer whose car breaks down while driving through Snowdonia, in North Wales. After falling asleep in a nearby deserted tower, you wake to find yourself in a strange world, thrust into the role of adventurer. In your new role, you must explore the labyrinthine castles, forests, catacombs, and dungeons of the kingdom of Obitus, avoiding traps, battling baddies, and searching for the Gems of Tranquility and returning them to the Dark Tower.

Arrows and daggers are your primary weapons for battling the various enemies you will encounter, which include archers, trolls, wolves, wizards, knights, monsters, and more. You can also grab such helpful items as food, potions, keys, torches, powder of fire, and gold coins, and you can trade items with certain characters you meet. There are dozens of weapons and magical items in all. The game features first-person and side-view action, and the battles are in real time. An on-screen compass and maps included in the manual are helpful for navigating the areas, which you view through a window that takes up the top two-thirds of the screen.

Notable Quotable:
"If you're an RPG fan, then this title will appeal to you, otherwise beware. *Obitus* is a very slow-moving RPG that will appeal more to patient gamers. The graphics are good, but the bottom line is you must like RPGs." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

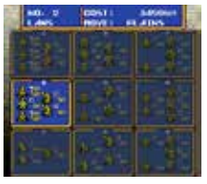
Notable Quotable:
"The SNES is the golden era of the RPG. There are just mountains of good quality games in this genre. *Obitus* is not one of them. In fact, this game is so bad it almost single-handedly drops the SNES to second place behind the PlayStation . . . What we are dealing with here is a *Dungeons & Dragons* knock-off game a lá *Eye of the Beholder* . . . The best way I can describe *Obitus* is to picture *Eye of the Beholder*, then break everything. We're talking bad controls, confusing mechanics, bland visuals, impossible enemies, cruddy sound effects, and no music. And you can starve! What kind of stupid game mechanic is that?" – SNES Hub (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The best of the three [computer versions] was the Amiga edition, which featured a slightly different screen configuration from the SNES version. The main display occupied

the top three-quarters of the screen, as does the SNES version (albeit with considerable framing). The bottom quarter of the Amiga version, however, featured an onscreen interface comprising nine command buttons, including eat, talk, sleep, pick up, drop, pause, etc.; a direction finder; inventory display window; and a gem-like disk prompt. The SNES edition has streamlined the onscreen interface considerably, while maintaining most of the play elements from the original. The horizontal strip at the bottom of the SNES *Obitus* features only four items: stamina and health gauges (represented by burning candles), direction finder, and inventory display." – *Electronic Games* (February 1994)

Ogre Battle: The March of the Black Queen

Publisher: Enix America.
Developer: Quest.
Game Type: Strategy Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.



The once bright and happy days of Zenobia are growing dark and cold—evil runs rampant over the entire continent. "The king is dead" is heard in hushed whispers from shadowy men. Sage Rashidi, trusted advisor to King Gran, was seduced by the evils of power. While in its grip, he slew the mighty king. He then joined forces with the evil Empress Endora, and the two of them ruled the land with terror. Thus began the Zetegenian Empire.

Now, almost twenty-five years later, the Empire rules with neither justice nor compassion. A group of hardy souls who are the last remaining members of a rebellion gather along the outskirts of Sharom. Outnumbered and outmatched, the rebellion desperately needs you, fearless gamer, to save the day by leading them to victory over the tyrannical Empire. Secrets carried through the wind tell of Warren, a great wizard who can help you in your quest for justice.

The hero you portray is the head of the rebel forces, a character who sometimes goes by the name Opinion Leader. His personality is formed based on answers you give to a series of six questions from a set of Tarot cards. You control the action by guiding a cursor around the screen and selecting icons. You will be called upon to find treasures, read maps, liberate cities, discover hidden cities, defend cities, change rebel unit formations, add characters to your unit, prepare your unit to fight bosses and armies, and much more.

Battles are turn-based and viewed from an isometric perspective while you move your troops in real time on the tactical map. Characters, which include military classes along with such fantasy creatures as angels, dragons, vampires, and werewolves, are ranked according to strength, reputation, experience, agility, intelligence, charisma, hit points, luck, and many other traits and attributes. You can build on these things as you journey through the game's thirty different locations. There are more than 200 types of weapons, spells, treasures, and other items to discover and twelve different game endings. Battery backup lets you save your progress after you have turned off your game system.

Only 25,000 copies of the cartridge were released in North America, making it hard to find today. In 1996, the game—which was the first in the series but the fifth in terms of storyline—was re-released for the PlayStation and Saturn with better graphics and additional music. Followed by such sequels as *Ogre Battle 64: Person of Lordly Caliber* (Nintendo 64), *Tactics Ogre: Let Us Cling Together* (PSP), and *Tactics Ogre: The Knight of Lodis* (Game Boy Advance).

Notable Quotable:

"While the game is lauded for its depth in terms of customization it is also criticized for its brutal learning curve. Many features are poorly documented or explained, and as a result can only be discovered via trial and error. Many a player would unwittingly progress quite far into the game only to realize his forces have been improperly trained and are vastly inferior when compared to the enemy. The game also featured multiple endings; however, due to the aforementioned poor documentation, especially in regards to the reputation and alignment system, many players would receive a 'bad' ending, where they themselves have become a bloodthirsty tyrant with many of the characters they encountered plotting against them. Whether this is some kind of social commentary about the nature of war or simply poor game design has yet to be and probably never will be determined. Despite these criticisms, the game is loved by fans for its massive depth, endearing charm, and poignant storyline." – Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

Insider Insight:

When I was a teenager during the mid-to-late '80s, everyone had a Nintendo Entertainment System. Soon enough we found ourselves split into two factions: Super Nintendo or Sega Genesis. For whatever reason, I found myself happily in the latter. For the most part, I had very little exposure to the SNES, being blissfully ignorant during my games of *Shining Force*, *Shining in the Darkness*, *Phantasy Star*, and *Shadowrun*. The Genesis had always scratched my RPG itch nicely until one of my best friends started working where I worked in the early '90s. This guy was unapologetically a Nintendo kid; he was heavily into his SNES and all of its *Chrono Trigger* and *Final Fantasy* goodness.

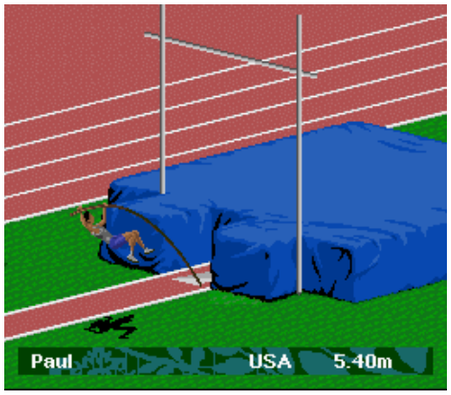
One day, while I was waiting on him to get ready so we could go to work, I decided to kill some time on his SNES, and that is when I ran across *Ogre Battle*. We ended up being late for work that day because the game was too much fun to put down. From the character generation being based on answering questions and tarot cards to the genre-bending mix of RPG and strategy, *Ogre Battle* was literally a game changer. It was not long before fellow nerds we worked with started flocking to my buddy's SNES to see what it was all about. Even though that was a quarter of a century ago, I can still hear his wife saying, "Every time I come into our living room, there's people I don't know playing *Ogre Battle*!" The fact that I can still sit down and play the game twenty-five years later shows why it remains my favorite title for a system I have never owned. – Michael Suitt

Olympic Summer Games

Publisher: Black Pearl Software.
Developer: Tiertex.
Game Type: Sports/Olympics, 1–8 players (alternating, 4-player simultaneous).
Year: 1996.

Based on the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games held in Atlanta, Georgia, *Olympic Summer Games* features ten track and field and shooting events: 100m Sprint, 110m Hurdles, Pole Vault, Triple Jump, Long Jump, High Jump, Javelin, Discus, Skeet Shooting, and Archery—the last of which takes wind into account. There are three difficulty levels and two modes of play: Competition and Practice. Gamers represent one of thirty-two different countries to challenge actual Olympic records.

As in *Track & Field*—the 1983 arcade classic that was ported to the NES in 1987—most of the events require players to furiously and alternately press two buttons to get the onscreen characters to run fast enough to perform well. The timing of button presses is also important, such as pressing "up" to jump in 110m Hurdles, "down" to plant the pole in the Pole Vault event, or the fire button to shoot when you have the crosshair lined up correctly in Skeet and Archery. The game was also released for the Game Boy and Genesis. The PlayStation and 3DO versions each feature motion-capture technology, TV-style presentation, and fifteen events.



Notable Quotable:

"Due to some sloppiness while coding the game, it is impossible to break two records: Archery and Skeet. On the other hand, breaking the Olympic record in Discus throw is quite trivial and can be done without any major effort." – Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You'll be tempted to use a controller with a turbo or auto fire button . . . 100m sprinting is a good place to start as it involves the simplest gameplay. Four runners race simultaneously, with the winner being the first over the line . . . The shooting events are in practice the most fun and varied, though their appeal does evaporate quickly . . . Skeet shooting is essentially the clay pigeon mode from *Duck Hunt*, made slightly less fun by the removal of a sarcastic dog . . . The character sprites, like the game *Flashback*, appear rotoscoped but they lack any facial features and at times seemed to be moving at odds with their direction of travel . . . The backgrounds are static with motionless officials equally devoid of detail . . . The menus are an embarrassment: white text on green backgrounds for the most part . . . The music is akin to something you would find in a cheap pachinko game. It's tinny, repetitive, distracting, and thankfully can be turned off." – Boxed Pixels (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

On the Ball

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: Taito.
Game Type: Maze Puzzle, 1 or 2 players (alternating).
Year: 1992.

A game that turns *Marble Madness* on its ear and makes creative use of the Super NES's vaunted Mode 7 effects, *On the Ball* has players rotating (clockwise or counterclockwise) a series of ninety-nine different obstacle-laden maze game boards to progress a gravity-sensitive ball to the finish line within a set amount of time. For certain obstacles, such as bricks, you must build up momentum to crash the ball through, but others, like traffic lights, toggle on and off and require timing to pass. Some objects you run into provide extra time to complete the level, while others give you time penalties. Some merely alter the course of the ball. There are also dead ends to contend with.

Playing *On the Ball*, which is compatible with the Super NES Mouse, can be a bit dizzying, but the unusual gameplay is strangely addicting, and the overall concept is a good one. Reverse Gravity rounds, Limited Rotation rounds, and varying degrees of course difficulty (training, beginner, special, and expert) make the game sufficiently challenging, but not frustratingly so. The action is somewhat similar to the Chaos Emerald bonus rounds in *Sonic the Hedgehog*. A port of Taito's *Cameltry*, which hit the arcades in 1989, *On the Ball* spawned a Nintendo DS sequel called *Labyrinth* (2007).

Notable Quotable:

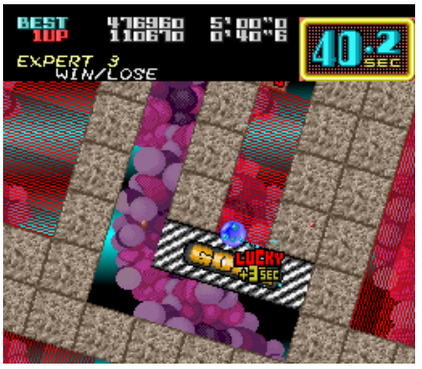
"Another weird and wonderful game for the Super NES that is great for two competitive point-grabbing puzzle-o-maniacs but not necessarily the business for a single player looking for big thrills." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (February 1993)

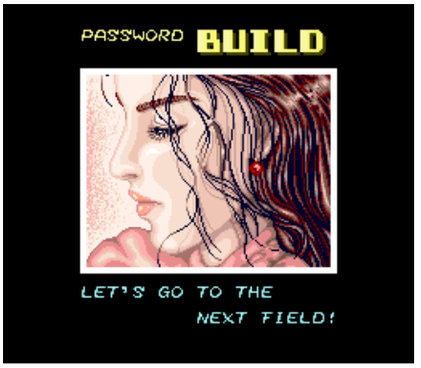
Notable Quotable:

"If you are one of those people who live in constant fear of becoming addicted to a video game, watch out! *On the Ball* is nearly impossible to put down once you pick it up! The rotation can make you dizzy, and the challenge can make you sweat!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"This game rules . . . simple but also fun. It's got that arcade simplicity that makes it easy to pick up and hard to put down. It has a funky '90s soundtrack, and it looks cool. Some of the backgrounds have this very trippy quality. The way the screen rotates is impressive, although I can also see it being a bit nauseating . . . You might want to wait a half hour after eating to play this freaking thing. There are a few other drawbacks . . . There's not much to this . . . as good a time as it is, it's also a very short time . . . not much replay value." – CGR Undertow (YouTube)





Operation Europe: Path to Victory 1939–45

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Command the Allied or Axis forces in *Operation Europe* for the Super Nintendo. The year is 1939, and Adolph Hitler's war machine is rampaging across Europe. Players can help or hinder his dubious conquest through six historical WWII campaigns (taking place around Western Europe, Eastern Europe, Central Europe, and North Africa): Occupation of France, North African War, Fierce Battle of Kursk, Storming of Normandy, Battle of the Bulge, and Fight for Berlin.

Gameplay consists of ordering supplies, calling on reinforcements, raiding enemy cities, relieving inefficient commanders, sabotaging supply lines to enemy cities, assassinating enemy commanders with special forces, dropping paratroopers into occupied cities, ordering tanks to open fire, having engineers lay mines, outflanking enemies on the battlefield, keeping supply and repair regiments safe, monitoring soldier fatigue, and much more, including modifying officers' stats through an RPG-like randomization feature.

Commanders to control include Patton, McAuliffe, and Montgomery for the Allies, and Rommel, Rundstedt, and Manstein for the Axis powers. You will receive direct orders from historical figures, such as when Hitler pops up in the bottom/right of the screen and tells you (via text) to "Invade France! This is the dawning of the German empire!" You do not directly manipulate your troops; rather, you issue them such orders as "move" and "occupy." During battles, you are shown an up-close look at the playfield as you order units to attack, defend, follow friendlies, or pursue enemies.

Strategic maneuvering and planning are the orders of the day in this deep, involving, complex war simulation. Known in Japan as *Europa Sensen*. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Another historical/strategy game in a historical context by Koei—strategy fans will want to check this out. Being able to pick your battle scenario and play as the Allied or Axis army is a huge plus. A must-have for military buffs." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Unlike most military-strategy games, the computer is a thoughtful, skilled opponent. So even if you don't have a friend to go head-to-head with, the game is still enjoyable and challenging. Unfortunately, the programmers spent so much time with strategy, they forgot what makes a great video game. The sound, for instance, is forgettable. With the exception of the powerful music for the battle display, the soundtrack ranges from mildly distracting to totally obnoxious . . . the simple graphics are only average . . . Gamers looking for nonstop action/adventure had better look elsewhere. *Operation Europe* has its shortcomings, but its challenging strategy makes it a game that no serious WW II buff should be without." – *GamePro* (July 1994)

Operation Logic Bomb

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Jaleco.
Game Type: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 Player.
Year: 1993.

The Subspace Particle Transfer Project Facility—a research laboratory experimenting with transporter technology (similar to the tech created by Jeff Goldblum's character in *The Fly*)—has been taken over by hostile aliens. These aliens are forcing the scientists to build subspace generators for their evil purposes. To deal with the intruders, the government sends in super soldier Logan, a mysterious individual with bionic implants, a bioelectric brain, and superhuman strength.

As Logan, you must infiltrate the labyrinthine lab (viewed from a top-down perspective), rescue captured scientists, and destroy scads of robots, aliens, and other creatures. To open a door to the next level all the enemies on the current level must be defeated, and sometimes backtracking is required. You begin with single- and triple-shot laser fire, but must search for and use a reflecting pulse laser, a ferro-plasma spray gun, automatic tracking missiles, a personal image duplicator (which creates a holographic decoy of your character), and timed directional blast mines. In addition, you will hook up to data terminals to read maps (to help you track your progress), discover clues, restore your power, and watch a video of the alien takeover. The first nine levels take place in the lab and outside of the lab in its surrounding terrain, while the tenth and final level immerses you in the inner confines of subspace.

To help you envision the action, imagine playing a game that combines elements of *Super Smash T.V.* and *Contra III: The Alien Wars* and adds a dash of intelligence. Unlike many games that involve a lot of shooting, not all the weapons work on all the creatures and obstructions. Plus, it is a nice change of pace that you have to backtrack to earlier levels, instead of just leaving them behind, finished and forgotten, once you have reached the end. Also, the enemies, though not as constant nor as relentless as those in *Super Smash T.V.*, are intelligent and tricky enough to put up a good fight. As with *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, all the weapons are fun to use. Known in Japan as *The Fortress of Fury*.

Notable Quotable:

"Sharp, detailed graphics and an ultra-hip soundtrack create the perfect atmosphere . . . details and shadows create a believable sense of depth. The controls are easy to learn and extremely responsive . . . gameplay is challenging, mainly because of its lack of 1-ups and extra continues. The enemies aren't difficult to take out. However, their sheer number turns it into a formidable task. Sharp stereo music and sound effects round out this solid game . . . an interesting blend of shooting action and trial-and-error gameplay." – *GamePro* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Everything operates fairly smoothly here. B fires your weapon, Y uses a special item, and X and A cycle through your items and weapons, respectively, very similar to the inventory system in *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*, but I think it works a little better here seeing as you only have a handful of weapons to cycle through . . . You can strafe by holding down one of the shoulder buttons, which locks you facing a direction while still having free range of motion, and you WILL be using this move quite a lot, because despite the relatively quick pace of the action, going gung-ho will get you blown to hell, and you'd be well-advised to use cover and get creative with the capabilities of your arsenal. Both you and the enemies can fire in eight directions, so you won't have too many situations where you have to expose yourself to fire just to line up a shot . . . *Operation Logic Bomb*'s not a bad game by any stretch of the word, but it is a little unsatisfying. The mechanics are fine, there's some fast-paced fun to be had, and it looks and sounds pretty damn good, especially for the time. Unfortunately, it's so short that if I didn't know better, I'd swear this was actually a demo version to get you excited for the full version coming in the future, and the most important pickup in the game is hidden so well that you might not even know it existed in the first place." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:
Back when the SNES was being phased out at retail, you could snap up plenty of new/sealed titles for a song. One of my close-out favorites is Jaleco's *Operation Logic Bomb*, which surprised me by not only being a challenging run-'n-gun, but the third game in the *Ikari no Yousai* series (*Fortified Zone* on the original Game Boy was the first, while *Ikari no Yousai 2* stayed in Japan as a GB exclusive). It is a game I initially avoided thanks to the iffy cover art, but seeing it at five dollars new made it hard to pass up. The best things about it were playing it to discover it was quite polished and getting friends who also disliked the cover art to try it, which got them to seek out their own copies, or even better, start collecting for the console—always a win-win in my book. – Greg Wilcox

Operation Thunderbolt

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: Taito.
Game Type: Light Gun Shooter, 1 or 2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

In 1988, Taito released to the arcades *Operation Thunderbolt*, the sequel to the better-known *Operation Wolf*, the coin-op classic from 1987. *Operation Wolf* was ported to the NES and Sega Master System, while *Operation Thunderbolt* found a home on the SNES. The translation came with a number of changes, including six playable characters as opposed to two.

According to www.racketboy.com, the storyline was altered as well: "The title, *Operation Thunderbolt*, refers to a hostage raid in 1976 in Uganda by the Israeli Defense Force. Before landing in Uganda, the hijackers had landed the plane in Libya for refueling. The [arcade] game *Operation Thunderbolt* changed this to a Green Beret operation to save American hostages in the fictional African province Kalubya. The Super Nintendo version changed this. Instead of two American operatives, it's now a mission of U.N. operatives taking on General Abdul Bazarre, ruler of the Bintazi People's Republic. Bazarre's men have hijacked a plane in an attempt to force various European governments to free his imprisoned comrades, and he's threatening to execute the passengers if his demands aren't met. And you're being sent in to stop him."

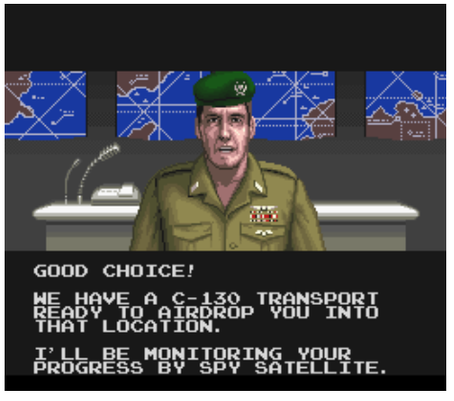
Compatible with the Super NES Mouse and Super Scope, the first-person, cursor-aiming action, which scrolls forward and horizontally, has players walking, driving a jeep, or piloting a boat (depending on the level) while using a limited supply of bullets and rocket bombs to shoot soldiers, choppers, and tanks. By shooting crates that fall from the sky, you can reload and grab weapons and bulletproof vests. Missions include Gather Intelligence Information, Locate Ammunition and Means of Transportation, Proceed to Enemy Headquarters, Rescue the Hostages!, Search Enemy Bunkers, Secure an Escape Route!, and Escape! Gameplay is redundant but fun, and the graphics, which include buildings, fences, lakes, mountains, trees, and the like, ooze with depth and detail. Released the same year as *Operation Wolf 3* in the arcades.

Notable Quotable:

"The jury's out on this one. When you're playing it alone, it gets pretty boring after a while, but with two players it's slightly more entertaining. It's full of death and violence, which is always a plus, but it just doesn't hold up to games like *DOOM* or *Alien: The Gun*, or *Revolution X* or even to the *Terminator 2* adaptation for the SNES, where you can feel the carnage. *Operation Thunderbolt* is really nothing special." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Your controls are sometimes your worst enemy because the targeting cursor moves slowly, occasionally leaving you open to enemy shots. Fortunately, the colorful, detailed backgrounds and large sprites make you keep trying. The sounds are also strong, as when you hear the clink of incoming knife blades. This Operation is a success, generating plenty of shootin' thrills for intermediate soldiers. You'll get a charge out of this Thunderbolt." – *GamePro* (January 1995)



Oscar

Publisher: Titus.
Developer: Flair Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

Released the same year as the vastly superior *Donkey Kong Country 3: Dixie Kong's Double Trouble!*, *Oscar* is a *Bubsy*-like platformer set in four Hollywood-themed environments that you can play in any order: Prehistoric, Horror, Cartoon, and Western. Oscar—a typical-for-the-time creature-with-an-attitude—runs, jumps, bounces, and swims through the game, collecting Oscars (as in Academy Award figurines), film canisters, and other items while avoiding and jumping on such enemies as dogs, dinosaurs, outlaws, zombies, and witches. Certain film canisters contain power-ups, such as wings that let you fly, or a spring that makes you jump higher. When you collect an item stars spray out, adding to the already busy visuals. Certain platforms, water, hills, obstacles, and other level elements bring the much better *Sonic the Hedgehog* to mind. To complete a level, Oscar must collect all the Oscars (some of which are out in the open, others harder to find) and locate the clapperboard exit.

Controls are floaty and Oscar moves annoyingly fast, but one power-up you can get is a ball-and-chain that slows him down, which is nice. Even more useful is the yo-yo power-up, which makes killing enemies easier and more fun, and which can be used for breaking down walls. A useless but interesting "power-up" is a Game Boy, which, amusingly enough, turns the graphics green. Another so-called "power-up" is a potion that turns you invisible, but not invincible, making the game difficult and super annoying to play. Oscar says, "Thanks, everybody!" each time he collects an Oscar, which gets old fast, and the music is light, slight, and tinny, lacking any semblance of orchestral oomph.

Oscar was originally released for Amiga computers in 1993, MS-DOS in 1994, and was remade in 2010, for the Nintendo DSi as *Oscar in Movieland*. The title character also appeared in *Oscar in Toyland* (2009, a remake of *Trolls*), *Oscar in Toyland 2* (2011), and *Oscar's World Tour* (2011), each for the DSi via DSiware.

Notable Quotable:

"*Oscar* is one of the worst platformers I've ever played . . . the platforming sucks so bad . . . the camera might be the worst thing about the game. It whips back and forth every time you tap in that direction. This makes everything disorienting, and you easily lose your sense of placement, especially when doing something as simple as jump on an enemy . . . The game's own rules aren't consistent. Some platforms you can jump through, others you can't, even though they look exactly the same. Add to that a camera that's all over the place, and you can get why this game is so frustrating . . . enemies blend in with the environment . . . It's awful. I hate it . . . the abrupt ending is one final giant middle finger right on your screen." – ProJared (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"*Oscar* arrived with zero fanfare . . . the visuals are poor . . . Control is a bit slippery, and it suffers from a herky jerky camera that whips a bit too much when changing directions, but

it's not something you can't overcome with a bit of practice . . . The yo-yo completely changes the dynamic of the game. Suddenly Oscar becomes an offensive force of nature. I kind of like how the first part of a level is approached with a more defensive mindset. But should you locate the yo-yo, things suddenly switch to a more offensive plan of attack. It's actually a bit refreshing because most platformers don't offer such a 180 mid-level like this game does. Sure, you can always kill enemies by jumping on their heads, but due to the loose control and speed of the game this isn't always recommended . . . As you can imagine, the yo-yo makes this a much easier game . . . Going through all 12 stages in a little over an hour, I'll be damned, *Oscar* grew on me. It isn't a good game by a long shot. But it can be oddly enjoyable at times, especially after the yo-yo is secured. There's also something slightly endearing about the quirks—from Oscar himself to the level design, the game has a strange appeal." -RVGFanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

Out of this World

Publisher: Interplay Productions.
Developer: Delphine Software.
Game Type: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Based on the 1991 computer game, *Out of This World* was a technological marvel of its time, featuring cel shading, rotoscoped animation, cinematic cut scenes, a scaling camera, polygonal graphics, digitized sound effects, and an epic musical score. Players guide an agile, red-headed scientist named Lester Knight Chaykin as he tries to escape an alien planet comprised of caverns, barren landscapes, and mountainous backgrounds. This involves walking, running, jumping, climbing, ducking (you can duck and attack at the same time), swimming, and shooting and kicking enemies, including leeches, hulking guards wielding laser guns, and large black creatures. By holding down the fire button on your gun for a short period of time you can use it as a force field. Hold it down longer to fire super shots, which can break through certain obstacles. You will also use teleporters, ride elevators, deactivate switches, and solve puzzles.

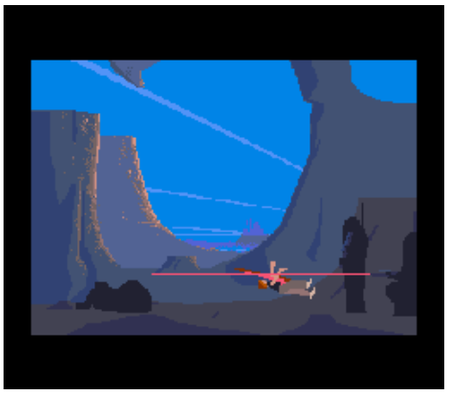
A slow, methodical title, *Out of This World* is not for everyone (passwords and infinite continues help stave off frustration, but some gamers will run out of patience), and the polygons have aged poorly, but its sustained sense of suspense, silky smooth animation, and groundbreaking cinematic presentation make it a worthwhile entry in the SNES library. The original computer game was called *Another World*, but was altered to *Out of This World* for release in America to avoid confusion with the popular soap opera. Also released for the Genesis and 3DO.

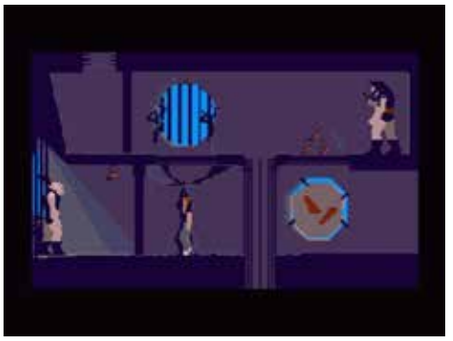
Notable Quotable:

"If you take on *Out of This World*, get ready to play something completely different. The animation moves are so real, you'll genuinely fret about the fate of your otherworldly, video friend. The action's hot, but don't expect video gymnastics with the same look and feel as *Contra III*, *ActRaiser*, or *Super Mario World*. The title says it all. This cart is Out of This World!" – *GamePro* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"You'll know this game is something special from just after the title screen, when the screen scrolls the diary entry of Lester Knight Chaykin away from you, *Star Wars*-style, the music blaring, imploring you to



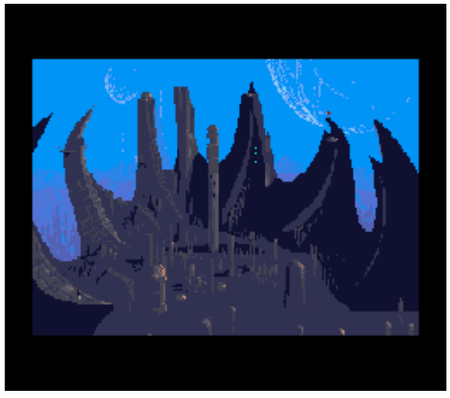


Out of this World

respond to its fanfare. If you're a persistent type like me, you'll play and die, and play and die, and persevere, and see Lester through to the game's touching, sequel-demanding conclusion." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Music is used very effectively here, changing pace to suit what's happening on screen, and conveying the feeling of tension brilliantly. Sound used to complement story so well is something of a rarity. True, this version is slower in places, but not so much so that it becomes unworkable. Otherwise, this is a very similar game to the Amiga one, with few graphical changes. A nicely presented, involving cart, then, but there's one big problem, and that's the lack of long-term playability. This game simply isn't going to last you a long time. To complete each section, a repetitive trial and error approach has to be adopted—there's no other way to do it—and to make this sort of mucking around acceptable, frequent passwords are given out. The problem this creates, of course, is that with only 14 sections to get through, and so much user-friendliness, you'll finish it in no time." – *Super Play* (November 1992)



Insider Insight:

Back in the day, a friend took me to the now-extinct Blockbuster Video near my house. After a couple months of release, they would usually sell their extra copies of games at the then-wonderful price of $19.99. So I got *Out of This World* on a whim, without the manual, and brought it over to play with my friends. As we dove into the game, we learned our main protagonist is Lester, a scientist of sorts who is accidentally transported to a strange alien world. If that did not sell us on the game, the fluid graphics, cinematic sequences, and silly dialogue did, and we played it for months. I remember a friend finally finishing the game as we all watched the ending in disbelief. It was one of the strangest and saddest endings any of us had experienced.

To set the stage for the sad ending here is the lead-up, complete with spoilers. Lester has befriended an alien, and they are trying to make it to a tower, laser guns flashing. Lester falls and is caught by one of the guards. He throws Lester around, kicking him, and it looks like he breaks his back. Suddenly the alien friend appears, and he begins fighting the guard. Lester, severely wounded, crawls on his stomach, trying to reach a control panel. You actually control Lester as he slowly pulls himself across the floor; this is not a cutscene or quick-time event.

Right before Lester reaches the control panel, the evil alien guard throws his alien pal off the walkway. He takes a couple steps toward Lester, who grabs the controls, disintegrating the alien. Then Lester crawls, trying to make it to a strange-looking, winged, reptile-like creature. Again, Lester moves slowly as he drags his legs behind him. He eventually makes it out of the room and is picked up by his alien friend, who apparently survived. He grabs and carries Lester to that strange flying creature. Then they fly away. Boom, that is the ending, leaving Lester injured on an alien world. After that I was so depressed I wanted to go home, but I didn't, because I knew that would get me picked on big time. – Stephen Smith

Out to Lunch

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Mindscape.
Game Type: Vertical Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1993.

A charming, challenging platformer that scrolls horizontally to fit the wide playfield on your TV, but moves vertically through the levels, *Out to Lunch* casts you as Pierre le Chef, trying to capture escaped food ingredients such as cheese, tomatoes, eggs, and mushrooms to take them to a cage. Be careful, though, because your arch rival Le Chef Noir can open the cage and release the food. To capture a food item, you must grab it with your net, which you will need to locate when the game begins. To stun a piece of food—making it easier to catch with your net—you can jump on it, or use a special weapon pick-up, such as a flour bag or a hot sauce-induced breath of fire.

You will run and jump through forty-eight levels spread across six countries: Switzerland, Greece, the West Indies, Mexico, China, and France. Many of the levels have secret rooms to discover. To proceed to the next level, you must catch a certain number of ingredients, which makes an exit door appear. Certain platforms you can jump through while others block your progress. The game has a number of nifty touches, such as teleporters, springboards you can jump on, eggs equipped with parachutes, smart bombs that stun everything (okay, nothing unusual here, but still useful), and skates to keep you from slipping on ice. Plus, after each country, you play a bonus round where you push a shopping cart to collect fruit off of shelves. The Game Boy version was downsized to forty levels and five countries.

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay is nice and simple, a classic platformer . . . The A.I. of the food is fairly decent for its time; it runs away from you only when you are in their line of sight. The controls are easy with maybe the exception of the run button; having to hold it down and jump can get irritating after a while. This game is a great little time waster . . . it's just plain hilarious running around trying to net your food." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Out to Lunch* is a fun and challenging game that most platformer/puzzle fans will initially enjoy. There are several neat features that keep the game from being repetitive and make the game highly enjoyable (for the first stage at least). For example, some of the higher platforms in Switzerland have ice on them, making it harder to run across and capture food on. There are also several items assorted throughout the map that are worth points, which makes the challenge even greater. Do you go after all of the items, hoping to get a higher score, or do you capture the food and get the hell out of the level before the time runs out? There are also several obstacles to avoid, such as bandits who try to steal your food and other enemies such as the black cheese in Greece (yuck!) that will block your way. The various foods will also put on a fight by running away from you as you approach them, and will even go as far as jumping on trampolines and sliding off of platforms to escape. It's a shame that the game doesn't remain this fun. Although there are several neat gameplay elements, they all become stale after the first stage. That's not good, especially when you have five more to go. A new obstacle or a new type of food might appear every once in a while, but it isn't anything new that you haven't already done. Instead of coming up with new puzzles and challenges in each stage, such as in *The Lost Vikings*, *Out to Lunch* takes a simple concept and repeats it over and over. One positive aspect is that the challenge gradually increases, but with the repetitive levels there isn't any reason to keep on playing it." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Outlander

Publisher: Mindscape. **Developer:** Mindscape. **Game Type:** Demolition/Combat Racing/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player. **Year:** 1993.

Essentially an unlicensed take on the 1981 post-apocalyptic film *Mad Max 2* (a.k.a. *The Road Warrior*), *Outlander* puts you in the role of a Mad Max-like survivalist, cruising down desert streets while dodging roadblocks and shooting bullets and surface-to-air missiles at such enemies as road pirates, gyrocopters, and Molotov-chucking bikers. You can also ram bikers from behind, but it is even more fun to get in front of a biker and slam on your brakes, causing the bike to explode while the driver is thrown forward and hits the pavement in front of you. Unlike the original Genesis version of the game, which plops players down inside the car, the SNES rendition features a behind-the-car, third-person perspective with front, rear, left, and right views. Also unlike the Genesis game, the SNES car actually has reverse.

When your car's hazard lights come on, you can exit the road, enter a town, and hop out of the vehicle for some side-scrolling combat. You will walk along punching, kicking, and firing a shotgun at such enemies as guys firing crossbows, gals shooting shotguns (you can duck under enemy fire), bikers wielding chains, and tall dudes wearing white tank tops ("wife beaters," if you will). You will also jump over landmines and gather much-needed supplies, including fuel, shotgun shells, nitro (for turbo boosts), car ammo, and food and water for restoring health. Beware the toxic food and water, which deplete your health. At the end of the game you will face Duster, a nine-foot-tall cyborg.

Notable Quotable:

"Oddly enough, *Outlander*'s slow speed and clunky controls do not detract from its fun factor. There's enough challenge to keep even the most jaded driver going, and there's something to be said for the perverse thrill of wiping people out on the open road." – *GamePro* (March 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"If you loved the Mad Max films, this game is for you. The gameplay was kinda clunky, but it was overall a fun game. When bikers would come up to your car window, you could take 'em out with your shotgun! Gyrocopters would fly by you and BOOM! Take 'em out with your rocket launcher on your car roof! This was not an easy game, but it feels like a '90s game. If you're up for a challenge, then check it out." – WGRD 97.9 (wgrd.com)

Notable Quotable:

"In the Genesis game, firing your car's machine guns and firing your shotgun out the side windows were done with the same button. This would often cause you to waste ammunition from one weapon while trying to hit an enemy with the other. On the SNES controller, the triggers are used to fire your shotgun left or right, while the B button fires your car's machine guns forward, fixing this. They even added the ability to drive in reverse for those times where you're stuck in front of an obstacle so you don't have to take additional damage as you right

yourself. The side-scrolling areas, unfortunately, are identical to their Genesis counterparts. The graphics and sound are superior but it's barely an improvement when you have to go through 24 versions of the same three or four areas . . . There are two changes to the game's detriment. One is that an entire enemy type, the jeeps seen in later levels of the Genesis game, are gone. They're replaced with many more road blocks for you to crash into than were in the Genesis game. The other is that your vehicle takes much more damage from collisions compared to the Genesis game. So despite the control improvements it's much more difficult to drive aggressively and enjoy the game's strengths. While the SNES version is generally preferred for its superior graphics and sound, many fans stick with the Genesis version for being more tightly balanced." – Chris Rasa (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Pac-Attack

Publisher: Namco Hometek.
Developer: Namco Ltd.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A combination of *Pac-Man* and *Tetris*, *Pac-Attack* mixes the ghost-gobbling action of the former with the falling block puzzle aspects of the latter. Your job is to maneuver the blocks into lines so they will vanish from the screen. Ghosts also fall from the top of the playfield, getting in the way of the solid lines you are trying to form. Luckily, Pac-Man accompanies the falling blocks from time to time, allowing you to maneuver him into position to munch the ghosts.

Similar to the standard version of *Tetris*, the Normal mode of play in *Pac-Attack* continues until the blocks and/or ghosts have stacked up to the top of the playfield. Each ghost Pac-Man eats adds a little gold to a Fairy Meter. When the meter is full, a fairy jumps onto the screen and throws a gold dust spell, effectively removing all the ghosts below it. The 2 Player VS Game features head-to-head split screen action, where eating more than five ghosts in succession drops a few ghosts on the opponent's playfield. The winner is the player who lasts the longest in two out of three rounds.

In the Puzzle game, you complete a level when you have gotten Pac-Man to eat all of the ghosts. If all of the ghosts have not been eaten after a certain number of blocks and ghosts have fallen from the top of the screen, you lose. You can retry each of the 100 levels again and again, and a password feature lets you save your progress. A great and oftentimes underrated cart, *Pac-Attack* is adapted from the 1992 Namco arcade game, *Cosmo Gang: The Puzzle*, which featured oddball creatures instead of *Pac-Man* characters. Also released for the Genesis and Game Gear.

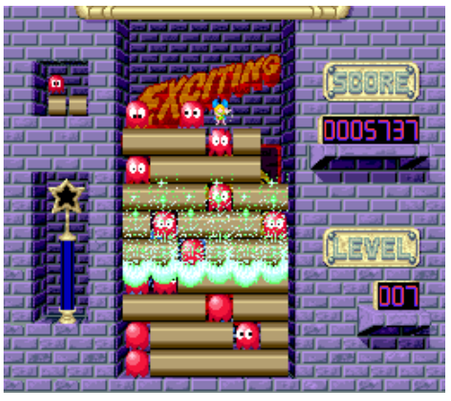
Fun Fact: The Game Boy version of *Pac-Attack*, which was not released in the US, is called *Pac-Panic*. It features a Super Game Boy-enhanced color palette.

Notable Quotable:

"*Pac-Attack* was an obvious cash-in by Namco on games like *Tetris*, *Dr. Mario*, and *Puyo-Puyo*, but it's actually quite good . . . Accompanying [the gameplay] is a soundtrack which is quite nice. The main game theme is a largely expanded remix of the theme that played in intermissions in the original *Pac-Man*, while the title screen and Puzzle mode themes are original songs that also sound quite good. There is also a suitably fast-paced, nice song for two-player mode." – Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com)

Notable Quotable:

"When it comes to visuals, *Pac-Attack* looks like any other puzzle game with crisp sprites and minimal animations. However, after playing for a while you'll start to simply want more. *Tetris* did a good job of constantly changing the color palette as you play, but everything here remains unchanged no matter how long you survive. This lack of visual variety certainly makes the experience much more monotonous than it already is. That being said, the graphics change depending on what mode you play, but that just doesn't cut it. On the plus side, the included soundtrack (complete with a funky remix of classic *Pac-Man* music) is pretty cool. Too bad it repeats as often as it does . . . The main issue with *Pac-Attack*'s gameplay is that it's so one-note that it becomes exhausting rather quickly. Stacking up blocks to create paths of ghosts while waiting for the next Pac-Man piece to show up devolves into an ultimately unrewarding and repetitive formula. Even when you manage to make Pac-Man eat a ton of ghosts and the resulting avalanche clears multiple lines, it still doesn't feel as satisfying as making back-to-back Tetrises or clearing all of the viruses in *Dr. Mario* . . . The most enjoyable mode is obviously Versus, where you can go head-to-head with a friend. As you battle, players send ghosts to each other, and it can get quite thrilling when you're both close to the top. However, once you've played a few matches then you'll be ready to move on to something else." – A J Maciejewski (videochums.com)



Pac-In-Time

Publisher: Namco Hometek.
Developer: Atreid Concept SA.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

An enjoyable, albeit lesser known *Pac-Man* offshoot, *Pac-In-Time* is a running, jumping (which is actually more like bouncing), side-scrolling adventure that gives the venerable pie-shaped character some new abilities, such as swinging on ropes, swimming, riding a Pac-Copter and a sponge raft, and dispatching enemies with fireballs and a sledgehammer (which can also break open certain doors). Enemies and obstacles include spikes, rats, monsters, fruit, a living snowman, slashing knives, and much more.

In a nod to the past, Pac-Man—who is Pac-Boy here, because Ghost Witch has transported him back in time—must eat a certain number of pellets to get past each of the game's fifty-plus stages, which are spread over five levels: The Mountains, The Forest, Forgotten Palace, The Village, and The Castle. Also Pac, who spins when he jumps, can gobble up larger pellets to kill ghosts.

The sound effects and music are repetitive, but the graphics are colorfully cute and nicely animated. Puzzle elements, such as levers, blocks that can be pushed and pulled, and keys for opening doors and chests, help make the game a challenge. The Game Boy version of *Pac-In-Time* is a rebranded version of the 1993 computer title, *Fury of the Furries*, but the Super Nintendo version, while similar, is an entirely new game.

Memories: Of all the *Pac-Man* sequels and spinoffs, my favorite is *Super Pac-Man*, which hit the arcades in 1982. It is not as smooth as a game like *Ms. Pac-Man*, but it has lots of cool features, such as the ability for Pac-Man to grow large and eat through the maze walls. I liked it in the arcades, but played it even more at home on my PlayStation via *Namco Museum Vol. 2*. Regarding Pac-Man games where the title character has legs, I like *Pac-In-Time* better than *Pac-Land* or *Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures*.

Notable Quotable:

"*Pac-In-Time* has the makings of a great game. It combines fast-paced action with puzzle-solving abilities. The graphics and animation make this the best-looking *Pac-Man* yet. The game is fun and you can sit right down and play. However, *PIT* lacks the substance that'll keep people coming back. The music is a bit on the repetitive side. All in all, it's a good game, but not an outstanding cart." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Pac-Man* fans will dig the characters and the familiar theme music at the opening of each stage, but *Pac-in-Time* really has little to do with the maze game that launched a thousand maze games. However, unlike *Pac-Land*—a previous attempt to blend the *Pac-Man* universe with a platform-game scenario—this one is a pleasantly addictive romp that knows just how to tease players into coming back for more." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1995)

Insider Insight:

Pac-In-Time is the only SNES title that I own multiple sealed copies of and have yet to actually play the game. The story about how I acquired the games is more entertaining than playing the game itself, or so I would imagine (having not played the game and all, it is hard to say).

In the late '90s, I traded a near-mint-condition Vectrex game system to a fellow rec.videogame.marketplace news group user. After a few emails back and forth, we worked out a trade for somewhere around $200 in Toys "R" Us Jeffrey Bucks and some sealed Atari games for the working Vectrex system.

We agreed to meet at the Sears at the Galleria Mall, so he drove all the way out to Buffalo, New York, from Cleveland, Ohio, to complete the trade, as Vectrex consoles were notorious for breaking during shipping. I dragged my girlfriend Roberta with me that day against her will to meet up with the guy, who also brought his girlfriend. By the looks on their faces, you could tell both our girlfriends were unimpressed with the nerdy deal they were witnessing. After we spoke for about thirty minutes in the parking lot, the other couple took off back to Ohio and I headed straight to Toys "R" Us to cash in my new found Jeffrey Bucks for more games.

That same week saw the launch of *Mario Kart 64*, which was the main reason I was selling the Vectrex, to free up some cash. At Toys "R" Us I picked up a copy of *Mario Kart 64*, along with sealed copies of *Pac-In-Time* and *Monopoly* for around $5 each. I figured these would be good for trades someday down the road. I spent the rest of the Jeffrey Bucks on various Lion King plush animals as payment to my girlfriend for putting up with me on that geeky adventure.

While writing about this trade from more than two decades ago, I brought up the experience to my wife to reminisce (yes, Roberta was crazy enough to actually marry me), who looked at me with that same look of disgust as she had all those years ago when I told her some dude from Ohio was driving up to trade games for toy store credit. Her response confirms that this was the single greatest game trade of my life. – Russ Kumro

Pac-Man 2: The New Adventures

Publisher: Namco Hometek.
Developer: Namco Ltd.
Game Type: Adventure Puzzle, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Reminiscent of the NES game *Gumshoe*, *Pac-Man 2* does not put players in direct control of the title character. Rather, more subtle methods of guiding the hero game are used, specifically "Namco's innovative Character Guidance Interface." By guiding a pointer around the screen, players aim a slingshot. Firing said slingshot at on-screen items affects the environment and lets Pac-Man—who has arms and legs here—progress, such as running away from a crow, riding a glider over a canyon, jumping up to climb a rope, riding a runaway mine cart, or milking a cow to get milk for Pac-Baby, to name just a few actions.

Making Pac-Man switch directions and look at certain things play key roles in the puzzle-based levels. Helpful items you can get include power pellets for turning into Super Pac-Man (who can gobble ghosts), ID cards for opening doors to the factory, a ropeway pass (garnered from Ms. Pac-Man) for reaching the mountain top, and a train pass for going to the city. If Pac-Man gets stuck or the game is not advancing, shoot the slingshot at different items you see and maybe that will help. Some gamers will find the going tedious while others will revel in the cute, cartoonish, puzzle-based action. Entering PCMNDPW as the password lets gamers play the arcade classic *Pac-Man*, while MSPCMND unlocks *Ms. Pac-Man*. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Pac-Man? Where did he get unearthed from? But hey, this game is very cool! Pac's dot-munching days of long ago take a back seat to a great adventure that's both unique and fun to play. Playing more like a point-and-click adventure, it may take hardened Pac players to adjust. The scenes are all filled with fun and comical antics to accomplish before moving onto the next scene. Pac is back!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The most enjoyable parts of this game are when Pac gets knocked silly, whether in the face or a spider on the nose. These little scenes, plus the chance to play the original *Pac-Man* almost made this game enjoyable. Almost! *Pac-Man 2* is no step forward, graphically or in any other sense. The controls leave you pulling your hair out, but it's a cute kids game that requires a heck of a lot more patience than I have." – *Game Players* (September 1994)

Insider Insight:
Like every kid in the early '80s, I was a huge *Pac-Man* fan. I ate the cereal. I ate from the lunchbox. I even themed my entire sixth birthday around him—Mom loved the ease of making a round cake with a wedge cut out. You would think a game called *Pac-Man 2* would have been a huge deal, wouldn't you? But I do not remember reading a single article about the game in any of the numerous gaming mags I read back in the day. Sure, there had been plenty of *Pac-Man* successors since 1980—but Pac-Man TWO?! A sequel fourteen years in the making?! That was big gaming news, my friends. At least to me.

So I rented it. And it wasn't anything like I suspected. There were no mazes, the dot-gobbling was much more sporadic, the ghosts only occasionally jumped in as threats, and it was just . . . not what I would call a *Pac-Man* game at all. It wasn't even a platformer, or really like anything I had played up to that point. I was controlling a slingshot from a first-person perspective as Pac-Man bumbled about his day. Since your actions affect Pac-Man, but you are not actually Pac-Man, does this make *Pac-Man 2* a second-person shooter? It is so hard to classify. One other awesome addition that sticks out to me: never before had I played a sequel that featured its entire predecessor playable within it. You could play a pretty much arcade-perfect *Pac-Man* here, and it was awesome. *Ms. Pac-Man*, too!

To this day, it amazes me how many other games before *Pac-Man 2* were more fitting of the title "Pac-Man 2"; *Pac-Mania* especially comes to mind. Maybe even *Super Pac-Man* or the platformer that was *Pac-Land*. But I will take what we got. What a weird game! I love it! – Chris Baker

Packy & Marlon

Publisher: Raya Systems.
Developer: WaveQuest.
Game Type: Educational/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

An infestation of rats has invaded Camp Wa-kee, stealing food and medical supplies and hiding them in different areas of the camp, including around the lakes, mountains, playgrounds, woods, and haunted cabins. As Packy the elephant, you must search for these items while fending off foes (including rats and fish) by shooting peanuts and water from your trunk. Each weapon can be upgraded—peanuts to red peanuts and water to red water (which looks like blood)—and you can also jump on enemies. A second player can join in as Marlon for co-op action.

As with *Captain Novolin*—also by Raya—the protagonist(s) has diabetes, and you must check your blood glucose levels, take insulin, eat healthy foods, and answer multiple choice questions about diabetes posed by your friends, which include hat-wearing lions, beavers, zebras, and dolphins. Unlike *Captain Novolin*, which is a low-to-the-ground platformer, this game has more of a tall, *Castlevania*-type design with stairs, ladders, and vines to climb, along with vertical scrolling to show the entire playfield. There are underwater swimming areas as well, along with boss battles. The game, which is a decent platformer for an education title, also features a *Super Mario World*-type world map.

Raya's other educational action games for the SNES include *Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon* and *Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus*. According to the *Digital Press Collector's Guide Advance* (2004), *Packy & Marlon* is the rarest of the four Raya health cartridges.

Notable Quotable:

"*Packy & Marlon* was designed to help remove the stigma of being different, so young people with diabetes who played the game with their friends and saw that their friends did not consider diabetes to be a big issue, would be more willing to do important self-care throughout the day, even when their friends were around. And this is what actually happened." – *Packy & Marlon* designer Debra Lieberman (www.highbeam.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Eighteen grueling cookie-cutter levels are waiting to be played in *Packy & Marlon*. After about six stages you will notice that the levels repeat themselves. This directly translates into you having to repeat each type of stage about four times, with around five types of stages. Variation occurs, but generally in the type of subterfuge used by game developers when they expect you to believe different colors equal different enemies." – Kevin "The Goblin" Wilson (www.somethingawful.com)

Insider Insight:

"Kelsey, you have to check out this game."

I was still training at my new job at a little retro video game store in Seattle called Pink Gorilla Games. My boss, a long-time game collector, held up a Super Nintendo cartridge that appeared to feature two fully-clothed elephants grinning.

"It's a game about diabetes!"

I had never seen such a weird concept in my life. Elephants with diabetes? I was fascinated. Looking back, *Packy & Marlon* is not all that crazy. At its core, it is an okay platformer that forces you to learn as you play: you have to eat healthy and give yourself insulin shots to control your blood glucose levels or else repeat the level. It is just one of the many "edutainment" titles produced in the mid-'90s, and believe it or not, not even the only diabetes-based game on the Super Nintendo. For all the ridicule edutainment games seem to get, *Packy & Marlon* is not a bad game. It is not insultingly juvenile like its predecessor, *Captain Novolin*, and while diabetes is clearly the focus of the game, it is not so heavy handed that I could not enjoy it.

No one in my family is diabetic. I have little use for the diabetes education I accidentally got playing this game, but it inspired something weird in me. I first played *Packy & Marlon* in 2012, and since then my game collection has morphed into a celebration of oddball, obscure games and hardware. Among the Handy Sonar fishing attachment for the Wonderswan, the obsolete Famicom modem, the enormous Super Nintendo Life Cycle 3500 stationary bike, and appropriately right next to the Bayer Didget Blood Glucose Monitor for Nintendo DS, there still sits a copy of *Packy & Marlon*: a testament to the kind of weird pieces of gaming history that I love. – Kelsey Lewin

The Pagemaster

Publisher: Fox Interactive.
Developer: Probe.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Based on the 1994 film, which featured animation and live action, *The Pagemaster* finds Richard Tyler in a wondrous library filled with flying books and fictional horror, fantasy, and adventure characters come to life. To make it back to the outside world of reality, Richard must run, jump, and battle his way through sixty-eight levels of pirates, fire creatures, ghosts, grim reapers, skeletons, and other baddies, including such literary faves as Captain Ahab (who throws his harpoon), Mr. Hyde (who throws flasks that explode when they hit the ground), Long John Silver (and his parrot), and Humpty Dumpty (who sits on platforms and falls when Richard is near).

Richard, who was played by Macaulay Culkin in the movie, can jump on the enemies, but he can also use such weapons as a pirate's sword, gooey eyeballs, and magic dust. Other helpful items include sticky hands (enhanced climbing), helmets (temporary invincibility), and magic shoes (higher jumps). Richard will climb ropes and ladders, dodge the crushing fist of Frankenstein, ride moving platforms, and much more in this adventurous game. If Richard collects a bonus game token in a level, he will play a special "3-D Bonus Flying Game," where he flies across land and sea, collecting gold tokens (100 give you an extra life) and bags of magic dust. If you survive until the end of the bonus game you will receive a special reward—usually an extra life.

The Pagemaster suffers from the same flaw that plagues so many action/platform games: at times when you jump from an upper surface to a lower surface you have no idea where you are headed, and you could land on anything from a bed of nails, to Captain Ahab, to a harmless book. The ability to look down half a level or so beneath your feet diminishes this problem somewhat, but most of the time in these situations your fate depends on luck or rote memory and not pure skill. This problem aside, it is not a bad game.

The graphics, though not particularly innovative, feature some nice detail, such as when you shuffle your feet and your shoes stir up dust. Peppy music that fits the various themes and moods of the game complements the competently rendered creatures, books, and items. The sound effects are nothing special, but sprinkled throughout are some effective moments, such as when Frankenstein's fist comes crashing down. Similar to Disney's *Aladdin*. Also released for the Genesis and Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

"*Pagemaster* isn't bad, it just isn't as fun as it could've been. Younger gamers might enjoy this game the most, because the action's simple and the levels are relatively short. But with these controls, gamers are better off in the library." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"I don't know whether to like this game or not. *Pagemaster* is pretty much just like any other action game, even though there are areas that utilize Mode 7 . . . the play mechanics, which take some time to get used to, are pretty cool. The sound is pretty decent. Aside from that, nothing in this game really jumps out at me. Don't get me wrong. I think the game is pretty good. It's just slightly above average for me." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)

Insider Insight:

When I was a little girl in the '70s, the local library near my house was built into a stand of tall willows with a labyrinthine, wooded sidewalk that circled the grounds. Me and my friends would ride our bikes on the "boardwalk," weaving in and under the branches of the willows, sometimes stopping beneath the trees that formed a natural fortress around us.

We would park our bikes underneath this natural canopy and, like the nerdy intellectual hunter-gatherers we were, go in the library and check out books about space travel, lost treasure, and aliens, put them in our bike baskets, and ride our Stingrays back home. It felt like more of a conquest passing back through that weaving path of willows after we had filled our baskets with books. Indeed, we were capturing adventures then; sowing the seeds for thoughts we had not even had yet until we got home and opened the first pages of those books.

The Pagemaster, much like that long ago wend through a willow-covered path in pursuit of knowledge, spoke to my inner child in the very same way my long-ago trips to the library did. Using many of the same visual themes from storybook adventures I read as a child, like a Pied Piper, *Pagemaster* beckoned me onward through level after level of dark, cobwebby corridors, Big Bad Wolves, man-eating books, and ghostly galleons.

They say, "You can never truly feel like a kid again." Whoever said that is wrong. With video games you can. – Catherine DeSpira

Paladin's Quest

Publisher: Enix.
Developer: Copya System.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

On a dare, Chezni enters a forbidden temple outside his school of magic. Unfortunately, this unleashes an ancient power that destroys the town. As Chezni, you must prevent this power from destroying the world. Chezni is helped on his quest by a girl named Midia, along with an assortment of mercenaries. You can have up to four characters in your party. The top-down action has you traveling through an overworld map, dungeons, and towns, frequently stopping down to engage in random, turn-based, over-the-shoulder monster battles similar to those in *Dragon Warrior*. You can wield a sword, shield, or other weapon in each hand.

Characters gain experience points during battles, but the game is unusual, in that using magic takes away hit points (as opposed to magic points). Instead of learning spells individually, characters unlock spells by learning to wield eight types of spirits: Fire, Earth, Water, Air, Sphere, Sky, Heart, and Light. Combining two spirits creates a unique spell. Instead of traditional healing items and potions, the game uses bottles, which you will find during your quest, and which you can fill in many of the towns.

The music is by anime master Kohei Tanaka, who has worked on such properties as *Dragon Ball Z* and *Pokémon*. Cartoonish graphics with pastel coloring give the game an unusual look. Released in Japan as *Lennus: Memories of an Ancient Machine*, *Paladin's Quest* was originally packaged with a map and monster chart. The sequel, *Lennus II: The Apostles of the Seals*, was only released in Japan.

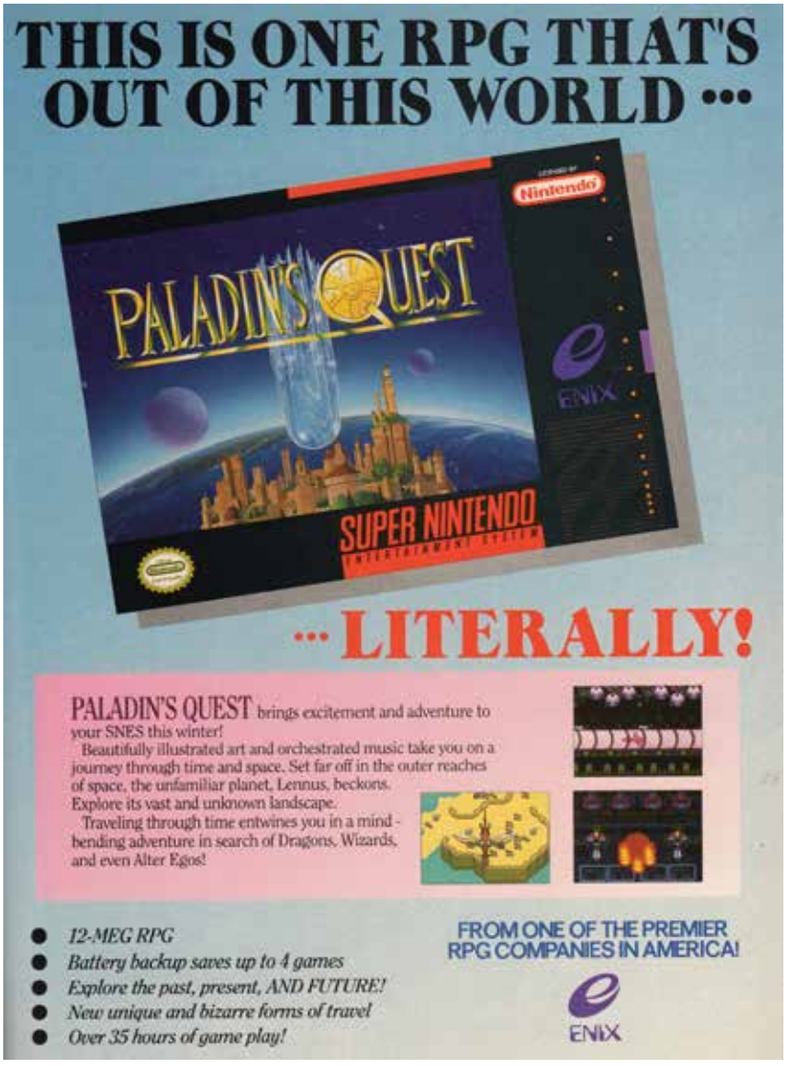
Notable Quotable:

"Despite many hits against *Paladin*, fans who enjoy lots of slow-going combat and character-building in their RPGs will appreciate the game for its enormous challenge and lengthy crusade. The rest of us, though, will do better keeping with the 'Zeldas,' 'Manas' and 'Final Fantasies' already out there and those on the horizon." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Holy crap, this game is weird looking. I understand the need to stand out from the pack of other turn-based role-playing games, but wow. This looks like some kind of bizarre fever dream . . . Where am I, trapped in Ness's dream in *EarthBound*? . . . This game may look really strange, and the dialogue is nothing to write home about, but make no mistake, the world of *Paladin's Quest* is unique unto itself, and the story fills it with characters and quests that make it feel fully realized . . . you level-up magic simply by using it, so it's like *Secret of Mana* where you grind and grind and spam the same attacks over and over in order to power up your magic . . . In terms of combat, this

definitely feels like an early Super Nintendo title, meaning you walk very slowly and the encounter rate is very high, so *Paladin's Quest* can be a grind fest." – SNES drunk (YouTube)



Insider Insight:

Back in the early '90s, a grocery store chain called Wegmans, in Western New York, opened video rental shops in some of its stores. They had VHS, 8-bit Nintendo, Super Nintendo, Sega Genesis, and even Game Boy games for rent. Each title was only ninety-nine cents per night! You were allowed a max of five games per day—not a bad deal for a teenager with ample time on his hands and a shiny new SNES demanding more games! I remember skipping lunch in high school to get an extra dollar a few times per week so I could rent more games.

I would speed over to Wegmans with my older brother after school to rent games. This gave me the opportunity to test drive the games I was less willing to take a chance on purchasing, and for the most part it proved that my gut feeling was right most of the time about the titles released by lesser known or questionable publishers.

I passed on renting *Paladin's Quest* for months until finally one day I realized I had rented just about every other game in the store, so I rented the cartridge, along with *Joe & Mac*. *Paladin's Quest* was published by Enix, which was a good sign, but was developed by lesser known Asmik. My only previous experience with Asmik was playing *Catrap* for the Game Boy, which was good but not great.

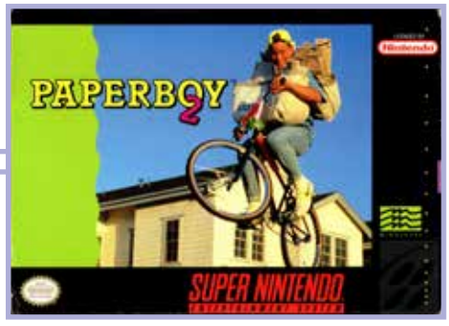
Paladin's Quest was a mildly entertaining RPG that felt amateurish from every angle, from subpar graphics with lots of odd design choices that looked more like an old IBM CGA color game, to dull music, to a dated battle system. It was not bad, but like *Catrap*, it just was not great. After a few more years and a few more Asmik releases, they never really had a hit on their hands. To me, it felt like the company put the bare minimum into their games to ensure they did not suck, but not much more. On a more positive note, *Paladin's Quest* was mildly successful, and there was even a sequel in Japan.

On an even more positive note, *Joe & Mac* was a lot of fun. Moreover, the turkey sub I picked up on the way out of Wegmans that day filled the void left by the mediocrity of *Paladin's Quest*. Anyone familiar with the awesomeness that is the Wegmans sub will know of its generous meat and cheese portions, its freshly baked fourteen-inch seeded roll, and their special crushed red pepper and oil sandwich spread that gave their subs their signature taste! I give the turkey sub five stars!

Years later, just like the larger standalone video rental chains, the Wegmans rentals shops met their demise and the space went back to displaying groceries and the like. Writing this makes me realize I took those old rental stores for granted. Just once I wish I had taken the time to pause and take in just how magical those experiences were. – Russ Kumro

Paperboy 2

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Tengen.
Game Type: Mission-Based Racing, 1 player.
Year: 1991.



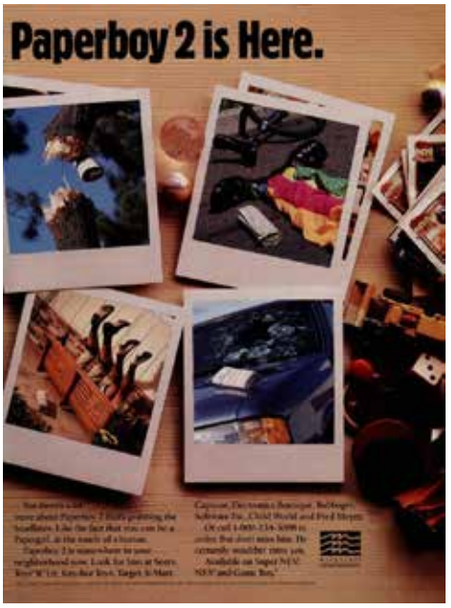
Paperboy 2 puts you in the role of newspaper delivery boy or girl. As you ride your bicycle through various neighborhoods, you must throw newspapers in mailboxes situated in front of subscribers' homes, thereby renewing the occupants' subscriptions. To gain additional points, you can throw papers at numerous other objects (which can damage you if you make contact), including baby strollers, burglars, sewer monsters, skateboarders, clowns, ghosts, zombies, birds, dogs, mummies, and scarecrows.

The three levels of play in this game are called weeks. Each week consists of twenty different houses. In addition to houses, you will pedal past gas stations, markets, carnivals, parks, a mall, and a car dealership. At the end of each level you can play a bonus training course, which involves throwing newspapers at targets. Unlike the first *Paperboy*, which Atari Games released to the arcades in 1985, this game has you throwing papers on both sides of the street. The original also lacked a papergirl and had fewer types of buildings and targets. *Paperboy 2* was also released for the NES, Genesis, Game Boy, and Game Gear.

Fun Fact: The original arcade version of *Paperboy* featured bicycle handlebar controls. *Paperboy 2* was only released for computers and consoles, meaning it was never in the arcades.

Notable Quotable:

"*Paperboy 2* is undeniably fun but very rough around the edges. Especially for the SNES, the visuals look awfully chunky and the animation is rough. It's hard to judge your position with respect to obstacles and ramps, and it doesn't help that the collision detection is extremely unforgiving. It's next-to-impossible to execute tight turns, and you'll have to contend with cheap shots from cannons and fireball-spewing gargoyles. In many cases the houses are so far off the street you can't even see if the newspaper made it to the mailbox and have to rely on audio cues instead. *Paperboy 2* has a likeable, whimsical style that will appeal to arcade gamers, but it's not the blockbuster sequel I was expecting." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Insider Insight:

Paperboy 2 is an interesting oddity of a game, as it is based on an arcade classic, yet only exists on consoles. Offering many advancements over its predecessor, the game has you not only going up the street and doing the obstacle course at the end of each day, but you now have houses on both sides of the street. There are also many more little tricks you can do for extra points, such as stop a baby in a runaway stroller and prevent a robbery at a convenience store. All of these additions make *Paperboy 2* a solid gaming experience and one of the best arcade throwbacks on the Super Nintendo.

Perhaps the most important aspect of *Paperboy 2* for me is that it is one of my wife's favorite games. The fact that I found a woman who enjoys video games is amazing, but the fact that she enjoys retro games is a miracle! When we play two-player mode she consistently outlasts me, and it is now to the point that I actually prefer the faster-paced Sega Genesis version due to the ability to jump on and off the curb. That is really my excuse, as she constantly beats me to a bloody pulp in the SNES version. She is just too good at the game, and to this day I have yet to beat her head-to-head! Along with *Tetris* & *Dr. Mario*, *Paperboy 2* gets a lot of playtime in my house. – Jeffrey Wittenhagen

The Peace Keepers

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Jaleco.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Released in Japan in 1993 as *Rushing Beat Shura*, *The Peace Keepers* is the third and final game in the *Final Fight*-style beat-'em-up trilogy that also includes *Rival Turf!* and *Brawl Brothers*. In a different storyline from the Japanese version, worldwide war has raged for years, but now, in the year 2015, a single corporation has risen to the top, promising an age of prosperity and law enforcement with its army of Peace Keepers robots. Unfortunately, the robots have gone berserk, creating chaos and destruction.

To thwart the various brutes and bad guys you will encounter in this game, you can punch, grab and throw, do flying kicks, and execute falling attacks (knee kick or buttslam). You can also taunt enemies, along with block their attacks and pick up and throw weapons at them. Further, certain characters can do dash attacks. Super attacks damage all on-screen enemies, but you only have two per continue. As in *Final Fight*, special moves deplete some of your energy.

You and a friend can select from four playable characters, each with a unique super attack and special move: Flynn (rushing uppercut, dragon wave), Echo (scissor kick, bird storm), Al (spinning clothesline, Acadian tiger), and Prokop (fire breath, thunder edge). Two more characters are available later in the game: Rick Norton (power shock, Ikari mode) and Orbot (dash combo, no special move). Characters also have their own techniques, such as Al's bazooka shots and Echo's double jumps. If a character gets hit repeatedly, he or she may go into angry mode, where they will be invincible and more powerful.

In addition to battling enemies, you will jump over or walk around such traps as holes and electricity. Areas to battle through include sewers, a hospital, waterfalls, an airport, a pirate dock, a boat, an island, the streets, and a bridge, among others. Most levels feature multiple paths and exits, and you can select to play as a different fighter after each level. The game has different endings as well. If you get tired of the Story Game, you and up to three friends can duke it out in a special, arena-style VS Game fighting mode, complete with weapons and customized backgrounds.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a very long and very good fighting game like *Brawl Brothers*! Huge levels and nonlinear game play makes this one quite a trip! The four-on-four free-for-all is a nice option, but doesn't come off that well. A good action/fighter." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

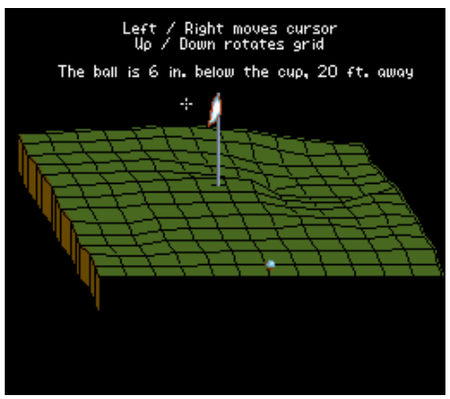
"The fighting engine has been greatly expanded [from the first two games in the series] with each character possessing a variety of techniques to further distinguish them from each other . . . Beyond the improved combat mechanics the game's best feature is its multiple paths . . . Where the series once looked contemporary and was able to keep up with its competition, visually the *Peace Keepers* looks dated. Games like *Final Fight 2*, *The Ninja Warriors*, and especially *Streets of Rage 3* were visually spectacular and looked better than many of the arcade games in the same genre at the time. To its credit the sprites are pretty large and animate smoothly but there are only a few enemy types that are recycled heavily throughout the game . . . *Peace Keepers* has mostly flat and lifeless backdrops with some ripped straight from *Brawl Brothers* . . . When the game was brought overseas a sizable number of changes were made, none for the better . . . As part of the localization process the facial portraits throughout the game were redrawn in a more realistic style which doesn't match the sprites at all; it's pretty hilarious to see Echo as a child yet her portrait is a grown woman. And the game can't decide whether Al is a black man or not." – Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

PGA European Tour

Publisher: Black Pearl Software.
Developer: Halestorm.
Game Type: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating).
Year: 1996.

The PGA Tour series goes across the pond with *PGA European Tour*, which lets players golf on five European courses: Valderrama (Spain), Wentworth (United Kingdom), Forest of Arden (United Kingdom), Crans-sur-Sierre (Switzerland), and Le Golf National (France). The three-click swing meter remains intact, but the roster features ten European pros: Tony Johnstone, Constantino Rocca, Rodger Davis, J. M. Olazabal, Colin Montgomerie, Ronan Rafferty, Sandy Lyle, Ian Woosnam, Bernard Langer, and Seve Ballesteros.

Play modes include Practice Round, Tournament, Skins Challenge, Match Play, Shoot-Out, Driving Range, and Putting Green. Battery backup will save one game. Other features include instant replays, mulligans (which let you take back your previous lie), a wind gauge, fourteen clubs in your bag (a default selection that you can change), a grid-based putting system that shows the slope of the green, and compatibility with Sports Sciences' TeeV Golf accessory, which is a golf club controller, "designed with the same weight and feel of a regular club, but only 26 inches long. The light-emitting club activates sensors in the base receiver as you take your normal swing. The sensors measure clubhead speed, clubface angle, and club path to determine realistic ball flight." *PGA European Tour* was also released for the Game Boy, Genesis, PlayStation, and Nintendo 64.



Notable Quotable:

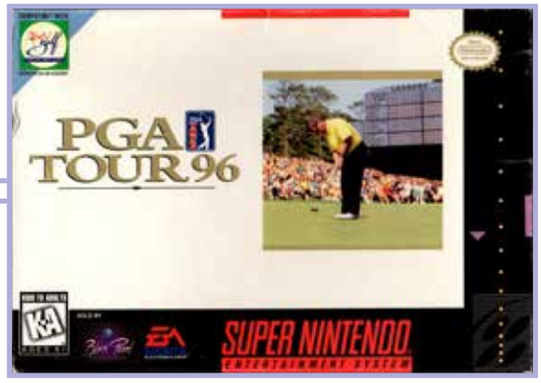
"*European Tour* is best thought of as a remake of the original game [*PGA Tour Golf*], rather than a sequel . . . The graphics are much more detailed and colorful, as you'd expect considering the intervening years of advances in programming." – Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*PGA European Tour* has pretty much exactly the same gameplay format and layout as *PGA Tour 96*, just a little smoother and better executed . . . the overhead and putting views aren't as cumbersome to access, and they don't take as long to load. The game has a better pace to it so you can move along a little quicker. Still, I'd rather play the original *PGA Tour Golf*." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

PGA Tour 96

Publisher: Black Pearl Software.
Developer: Halestorm.
Game Type: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.



PGA Tour 96 is much different than its Genesis counterpart, which changed the formula by rendering the courses and players in 3D. Rather, the more traditional SNES version is similar to *PGA Tour III* for the Genesis. There are three different Tournaments, plus six other modes: Practice Round, Skins Challenge, Match Play, Shoot-Out, Driving Range, and Putting Green. Courses include: Tournament Players Clubs at Summerlin, Sawgrass, Avenel, Southwind, River Highlands, Las Colinas, and Woodlands. Featured tournament pros include Tom Kite, Craig Stadler, Mark O'Meara, Fuzzy Zoeller, Jeff Sluman, Lee Janzen, Bruce Lietzke, Davis Love III, Brad Faxon, and Jim Gallagher Jr.

Players can create and save their own golfer via battery backup, which also saves stats and tournaments. A horizontal three-swing meter is used for starting the swing, setting the power, and setting the draw or fade. You can watch instant replays of the action, and winning tournaments nets you trophies and prize money. The Genesis counterpart (*PGA Tour III*) features course flybys with tips from PGA pros. It also switches to a different camera view for the landing of the ball. Followed by:

PGA Tour 97 (PlayStation, Saturn), *PGA Tour 98* (PlayStation), and the *Tiger Woods PGA Tour* series (various).

Notable Quotable:

"They take a step back with *PGA Tour 96* . . . It seems like they tried to cram too much into this game . . . so much slower." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"*PGA Tour 96* offers a lot of features in an attempt to deliver the best golfing game on the Super Nintendo. It's almost enough to make any would-be golfer drool with excitement . . . Unfortunately, the game is rather easy because of [the] swing meter, which is sort of a left-handed compliment. The control and interface are very intuitive and estimating a shot is precise, thanks to the clear percentage bars listed at the bottom of the horizontal swing meter . . . Your success at the game really depends on how well you can hit the accuracy point—a thin line that will make the ball go straight if you stop your swing right on it. If your swing ends up to the right of this point, you'll slice; if left, you'll hook. You can also put draw or fade on the ball in order to avoid hazards such as trees or water. Those who can master this timing method will probably think the game is too easy. There's another problem which may affect your overall enjoyment of this game: switching to the different menu screens is extremely slow . . . If the developers had added a camera that chased the ball as soon as it sailed into the air, offered a more challenging swing meter, sped up the menu screens, and improved the course graphics, the game would be close to perfect." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

PGA Tour Golf

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Sterling Silver Software.
Game Type: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating).
Year: 1992.

Based on the 1990 computer game, *PGA Tour Golf* is the first in a long line of golf titles from sports icon Electronic Arts. The game pioneered the innovative, oft-copied three-click swing meter used for starting the swing, setting the power, and setting the draw or fade. There are sixty PGA pros featured, including such stars as Paul Azinger, Larry Mize, Bruce Lietzke, Mark O'Meara, Joey Sindelar, and Craig Stadler, and there are four PGA courses to play on: Sawgrass, Avenel, Eagle Trace, and PGA West Stadium Course. Modes of play include Practice Round, Tournament, Driving Range, and Putting Green.

Other features include advice from the pros via text windows, flyby views of each hole, hazards (bunkers, water, sand, and trees), wind, divots, instant replays, club selection, a leader board, digitized sound effects, TV-style coverage, a grid-based putting system that shows the slope of the green, Mode 7 scaling and rotation, and battery backup for saving stats and tournament progress. The basic view is from behind the golfer. After the ball has been hit, the view scrolls forward to follow the ball. The manual includes a seven-page strategy section and some history on the courses included. Also released for the Game Gear and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The animation of the swing's a little jerky, but the scrolling as you follow the ball in flight's fast and smooth. Unfortunately, the rest of the game fails to match these high standards with very basic graphics and little if any background." – *N-Force* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"*PGA Tour Golf* is one of Electronic Arts' earlier experiments with the SNES, and is a conversion of what's generally agreed to be the best golf game on all formats. However, while the mechanics of the game are fine, presentation-wise it isn't ideal. The scrolling is jerky and the colors horrible—robbing the game of the atmosphere essential to a golf game. The ball doesn't move terribly realistically, either. It judders along and suddenly stops, rather than gliding to a halt." – *Super Play* (March 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*PTG* has a reasonably high replay factor due to its difficulty level . . . It's necessary to take wind, clubs, and terrain into account for each swing. Golf is a game requiring tremendous patience and consistency, and the same goes for *PTG*. It's paramount to stay neck-and-neck with the competition, as there are no grand slams or three-point plays to quickly make up ground. It's also necessary to put extra time into improving your chipping game, as I found that the most difficult to master . . . *PGA Tour Golf* is a complete golfing title that is well worth revisiting today. While some may have a preference toward the Links series or the SNES's own *Jack Nicklaus* golf, *PGT* is as simple as it is fair and challenging to the gamer.

Those needing their golf injected with fantasy elements will always be drawn to *Mario Golf*. But those of us who are content to hit the fairway old school, under a spry cloud covering with the birds chirping us encouragement, *PGA Tour Golf* is the right stroke indeed." – SNES Hub (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Phalanx

Publisher: Kemco.
Developer: ZOOM.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Despite the unfortunate, non-descriptive box photo depicting an old man wearing overalls and playing a banjo, *Phalanx* is an intense, nicely balanced side-scroller that belongs in the library of anyone who enjoys such SNES standouts as *Super R-Type*, *Axelay*, and *Gradius III*, and such Genesis gems as *Gaiares* and *Thunder Force III*. The controls are responsive, the bosses look great, the multi-level parallax scrolling is super smooth, and the levels of enemy-filled action are smartly designed. There was nothing revolutionary about *Phalanx* when it was released, but it is a nice example of a popular style of game at the time.

The action is set in 2279. As Wink Baulfield, you are the ace pilot of the space fighter A/144 Phalanx, which seems to operate in "threes." It can switch between three speed levels at any time, it has three hit points that can be restored by health power-ups, and it can store up to three selectable weapons at a time. There are also three difficulty levels in the game. Weapons, which you can grab as certain enemies leave them behind, include laser, homing, energizer (a chargeable weapon that fires energy bolts), ricochet, and three (there's that number again) types of missiles. Each weapon can be enhanced with power-ups, and certain weapons rotate around your ship, while others fire behind you or diagonally.

Thankfully, the game features more than three missions. In fact, there are eight: Assault, Under Water, Bio Cave, Deep Core, Destroyer (the entire level is a massive ship you must destroy), Advertise Area, Hyper Space, and Charge. Enemies include mechanical snake-like creatures, robot fish (á la *Darius*), large and small aliens, alien aircraft, and the like. In 2002, *Phalanx* was ported to the Game Boy Advance, but given a normal-looking space shooter cover and a different name for the ship's pilot: Rick Sanada.

Fun Fact: A hidden game called *Tiny Phalanx* is in *Zero Divide* for the PlayStation. To play *Tiny Phalanx*, simply hold down start and select on the second PlayStation controller while the game boots up.

Notable Quotable:

"At first glance, you may think this is your average shooter, but play a few levels and you'll think again. This game saves the best for last and gets progressively harder as you go along. Just wait till you see the last level! *Phalanx* is a winner." – *GameFan Magazine* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"This game so desperately wants to be *Thunder Force*, and I'm okay with that . . . also reminds me of *Whip Rush* on the Sega Genesis. Basically, this game just wants to be on the Sega Genesis . . . *Phalanx* is one of the best games in this genre on the Super Nintendo." – Lord Karnage (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"I think we have a front runner for the worst box art of all time . . . Considering I bought the game for $15 not too long after release, that should give you an idea how effective their tactic worked . . . once you get past the stupid cover, *Phalanx* is actually a pretty good shmup. What it lacks in original features it more than makes up for in graphics and solid level design. It skews a bit too heavily on the difficulty scale but overall it ranks pretty highly on the SNES shooter scale . . . The Gameboy Advance port tweaked the difficulty and is more forgiving, plus has an auto save feature, so if the SNES version proves too much to handle you can always go that route." – Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

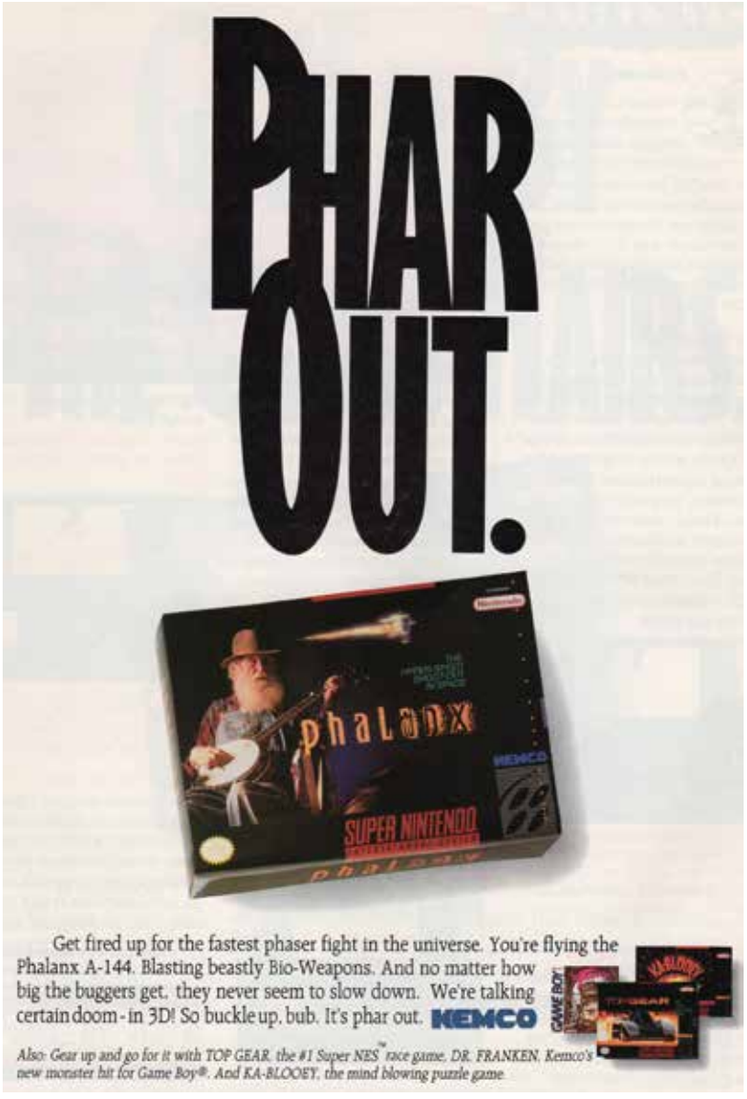
"*Phalanx* is not an easy game . . . It's guaranteed that you will die a few times per level, so learn how to pay attention to the level design and enemies so you won't use up all of your continues. Every enemy has a different flight and attack pattern . . . What I didn't appreciate was the fact that some obstacles weren't clear as to whether they were obstacles or not. At one time, I flew through the level, dodging and weaving so

Phalanx

as not to crash into some very obvious platforms—or so I thought. Right at the end of the platforms was a giant platform that appeared impassable. I prepared to lose some health only to find that the giant monolithic structure wouldn't do me any damage at all. I just flew right into it. What the heck!" – Random Access (randomacc.net)

Notable Quotable:

"*Phalanx* was just another Super NES side-scrolling shooter that we all probably would have forgotten by now—if not for the inexplicable shot of the bearded geezer strummin' a banjo on the game's box cover. Why the old guy? 'The problem is that all the game art looked alike at the time—monsters or spaceships or something,' explains Matt Guss, head of the advertising company behind the *Phalanx* campaign. 'We wanted to create shock value so someone would have to pick the game up. We called it the 'Heavy Huh?!' factor.' Art director Keith Campbell says they did the photo shoot themselves, hiring a model for the role of the 80-something hayseed. 'I'd used him before as Santa Claus on an album-cover shoot,' Guss adds. 'I remember him coming into the studio, and I thought the poor guy was gonna die right there on the stage. I think he'd had a stroke earlier—not earlier that day, but in the past. We stuck a banjo in his hands, and I think we stuck a spaceship behind his head that he was supposed to be staring at in wonder, sort of a *Star Wars*-come-to-the-Ozarks kind of thing.'" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 2001)



Insider Insight:

I like space shooters, and being from Kentucky, I love a good banjo pickin.' However, I never figured that the two would be combined until the day I found myself scratching my noggin in the aisle of the local Toys "R" Us! Most SNES players were probably relieved to discover that the old, bearded coot wearing the dusty fedora on the box cover was not in the game. I was too, although I have to admit that a bluegrass soundtrack might have been nice. I was not familiar with the game name, either. So I pulled the *Webster's Dictionary* off the ol' shelf, only to learn that "phalanx" was ancient Greek for "finger." Perhaps it was playing off the military term, but regardless, this fine SHMUP was quite the mystery back in 1992. – Michael Thomasson

Phantom 2040

Publisher: Viacom New Media.
Developer: Viacom New Media.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Boasting excellent graphics and sounds, a cool storyline, deep gameplay, strategic boss battles, fourteen weapons, and more than sixty levels of action, *Phantom 2040* is easily one of the best licensed games ever made. Players guide the running, jumping, flipping, purple-clad icon as he endeavors to stop Rebecca Madison and her army of biots that are programmed to stop "The Ghost Who Walks." A versatile hero, Phantom can ride elevators, duck under enemy bullets, set bombs to destroy terrorists, blast through floors and walls, shoot bad guys with his smart gun, climb and swing using his inductance rope, trash biots with his homing missiles, and much more.

Two weapons can be carried at once; an inventory system lets players keep all the collected items and weapons, and a map screen lets players select areas of Metropia to explore, including jungles, a warehouse, a university lab, a gunship, a sewer system, the Biot Factory, and the Phantom's Lair, all set to a rocking soundtrack. The game boasts multiple routes to take and twenty different endings. *Phantom 2040* is based on the 1994 animated series, which features a futuristic version of Lee Falk's gun-toting Phantom, a comic strip hero who first appeared in 1936. Also released for the Genesis.

Fun Fact: Prior to creating the Phantom for King Features Syndicate, cartoonist Lee Falk created Mandrake the Magician, who first appeared in 1934.

Notable Quotable:

"At first glance, I thought this would be another basic side-scroller. Once you play it though, you'll realize there is plenty of technique, like using the inductance rope to scale walls (a nice touch). Another surprising factor is how well *Phantom 2040* plays. The control is perfect! Although the animation of him walking appears painfully stiff and the enemies seem to pop out of nowhere, there is a lot to like about this game, especially with the wide array of weapons to use." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Phantom 2040* has to be one of the most under-appreciated games from the 16-bit era . . . If you enjoy action games with exploration elements such as *Metroid* and *Castlevania*, you need to take a serious look at *Phantom 2040* . . . The colors and backgrounds bring the sci-fi/comic book feel to the game. The detail of the world map, cutscenes, and slick menus also add to the level of polish . . . the Super Nintendo version does have superior graphics, but it isn't anything drastic." – Racket Boy (www.racketboy.com)

Insider Insight: The Phantom was created during the 1930s, but it was not until the property got an extreme '90s makeover that it came to my attention. What was once a swashbuckling jungle crusader was reimagined as an animated series, where the character was fighting robots in the not-too-distant future. None of the channels I had carried the show, so I blindly rented the game from a mom-and-pop convenience/fried chicken store and quickly fell in love with the purple-clad hero.

A rule of thumb I often go by is that grappling hooks make most video games awesome, and *Phantom 2040*'s inductance rope is one of the best there is, allowing you to effortlessly explore large, open worlds in search of secrets to unlock multiple endings, depending on how you complete objectives. This is coupled with a sparingly deep weapon system that lets you combine two weapons to create new combos that make certain sections easier, depending on your load-out.

What is perhaps most unusual about *Phantom 2040* is its worst feature: the password system. Before the era of save states and taking screen shots with your phone you had to copy down passwords, and *2040*'s were four lines, each with sixteen characters. This meant that most of the time you had to start the game over because you missed a character or two, but this did not stop me from loving the game, nor the Phantom in general. In the same year I discovered *Phantom 2040* on SNES, there was a feature-length *Phantom* film coming out. I called the Viacom New Media 800 number and bugged the poor people on the other end about the movie, but of course they knew absolutely nothing about it. – Blair Farrell

Pieces

Publisher: Atlus Software.
Developer: Prism Kikaku.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Cross *Tetris* with a jigsaw puzzle emulator and you essentially have the unusual and unusually fun *Pieces*, which lets up to five players compete in a race to be the first to complete a series of puzzles. Gamers can select from eight puzzle categories (including animals, sports, and world locations), each of which has eight puzzles ranging in size from thirty-six to sixty pieces. Competing with the computer or a friend, you must be the first to finish a puzzle (or series of puzzles) before your opponent (in split-screen action), or before time runs out (in full-screen mode).

As you guide a gloved hand around the screen, grabbing puzzle pieces—which are situated along the top, *not* falling down a well—to fit them into outlines on the puzzle to form a picture, random power-up items appear, including double, which hides two spaces on your opponent's screen; graphics, which briefly shows you a sketch of the solution; syringe, which erases all of your opponent's items; and mirror, which reflects your opponent's attack. There are eleven such items in all.

Puzzles, which are colorful and clearly defined, are easy at first, but power-ups become crucial during later stages. Multi-player mode is best, as competition can get heated. Fortunately for less-experienced players, you can handicap matches. Super NES Mouse and multi-tap adapter compatible, *Pieces* is a gem for fans of the genre, but it is very hard to find. Known as *Jigsaw Party* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:
"While the game is not as relaxing as working an actual puzzle—there is nothing relaxing about *Pieces*—it provides an entertaining alternative for those rainy days." – *Game Players* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"A nice feature is that more-advanced players can jump right to the harder levels by selecting one of three difficulty settings (normal, easy, or hard). Yet the problem with this is that the computer isn't particularly tough to beat once you learn how to effectively use items. The hard level pits you against the sixth computer opponent, meaning you only have to face two more to complete the game. The five previous opponents will be a cakewalk for anyone over the age of 10. This would be a major flaw if not for the excellent Versus and Jigsaw Modes. The Jigsaw Mode has up to five players competing at once to accumulate as many points as possible within a time limit. For every piece that fits correctly, you'll receive 10 points. Yet there are also bonus points in the form of flashing pieces, negative points from placing incorrect pieces (plus five seconds off the clock for every error), and the ability to steal pieces from other players. This mode can be as easy or difficult as you want with four different settings (including fake pieces and no diagrams), making *Pieces* one of the most entertaining multiplayer games on the system." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Pilotwings

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Flight Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

Join the Flight Club aviation school with *Pilotwings* for the SNES. After learning to fly and land a small biplane, you will pilot a helicopter, operate a rocket pack, hang glide, and skydive. You view the action from behind your craft.

As you begin, a flight instructor offers you a lesson in piloting the biplane and parachuting. You will try to land the plane safely on a runway, and then you will skydive through a set of rings and aim to land in the middle of a target zone. Success earns you certification, and you can move on to more difficult plane and parachute scenarios, along with the experimental rocket belt. Then it is on to the hang glider and helicopter.

As you soar through the clouds, you will turn right and left, lower and reduce throttle setting, monitor your altitude and speed, adjust your angle and approach, do stunts, monitor fuel consumption, be mindful of course boundaries, adjust for wind velocity, check target position, and more. You will be scored in various categories, including accuracy, angle, time, and speed. Instructors provide guidance, you can save your progress with passwords, and you can unlock Expert mode and birdman and penguin dive bonus stages.

Good controls, the fun sensation of soaring, and smooth scaling and rotation make the game a winner. One of the three SNES launch titles, *Pilotwings* spawned two sequels: *Pilotwings 64* for Nintendo 64 and *Pilotwings Resort* for the 3DS.

Notable Quotable:

"Requires more than the usual amount of attention to detail from the player . . . You'll really have to give some thought to the principles of aeronautics . . . The game makes good use of stereo sound to indicate changes in direction and wind." – *Ultimate Unauthorized Nintendo Super NES Game Strategies* (1991, Bantam Books).

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are simply incredible . . . a totally realistic environment to fly around . . . the skydiving has the most realistic wind effect you'll ever hear . . . I spent hours trying to get through each level—just to see what new graphical feasts awaited . . . the landscape is completely flat, but this doesn't detract at all from the gameplay . . . an essential purchase." – *Computer and Video Games* (April 1991)

Insider Insight:
My best friend in elementary school managed to get a Super NES shortly after its launch, and I remember going to his house to play an array of early releases: *Super Mario World*, *F-Zero*, *Gradius III*, and *Super R-Type*. *Pilotwings* proved to be one of my favorites of his initial library, slotting in nicely with my burgeoning interest in flying and aircraft. While it is easy to go back and find the faults in the game—the Mode 7 effects did not provide any real vertical depth to the landscapes, and the helicopter stages basically just relied on a lot of memorization and a bit of luck—it wasn't easy to find anything similar on game consoles at the time. Despite the limitations of the hardware, I loved that the game rewarded you for being able to adjust for wind, momentum, and the general rules of flight, and to this day I still enjoy risking a solid run to land on the expert platforms for those goofy bonus stages—Birdman! The Penguin suit!—and trying to land perfect scores.
– Kevin Bunch

Pinball Dreams

Publisher: GameTek.
Developer: Spidersoft LTD.
Game Type: Pinball, 1–8 players (alternating).
Year: 1994.

A straightforward, fairly realistic collection of pinball games with reasonably good ball physics, *Pinball Dreams* features four tables: Ignition, themed around a rocket launch, planets, and space exploration; Steel Wheel, where you operate a steam train in the Old West; Beat Box, based around bands, charts, tours, and the music industry; and Nightmare, a demon- and ghost-filled graveyard. Each table has typical pinball features, such as ramps, tunnels, warp roll-overs, drop-targets, mushroom bumpers, bonus multipliers, and ball traps.

As in most good pinball sims, you can push a button to nudge or shake the table. If you do this too much, you will tilt the game and lose your ball. The action is viewed from overhead and scrolls vertically (and to a lesser extent horizontally) to display the entirety of each table. Based on the 1992 Amiga game, which had red blood under the left pop bumper on the Nightmare table. The SNES "blood" was changed to blue, and crosses were removed from the Nightmare table. Known in Japan as *Pinball Pinball*. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Followed by *Pinball Fantasies*.

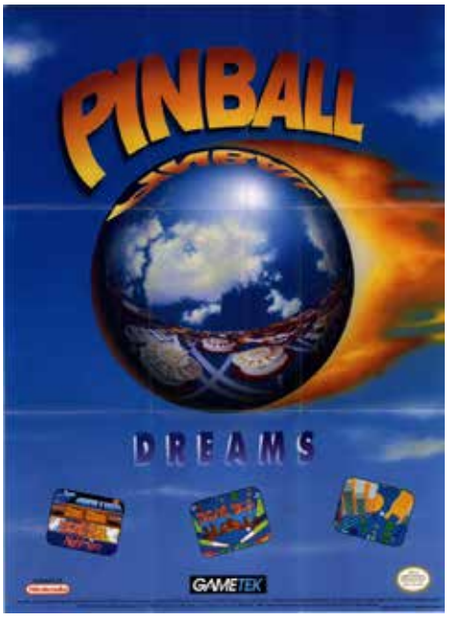
Fun Fact: A PC-exclusive sequel called *Pinball Dreams 2* was released in 1995. It featured four tables: Neptune (underwater exploration), Safari, Revenge of the Robot Warriors, and Stall Turn (aerobatics).

Notable Quotable:

"*Pinball Dreams* was a fun game for the computer systems, but the cartridge versions have stiffer competition to contend with. Even with multiple playfields, they don't have the spark or excitement of *Crüe Ball* or either of Tengen's Genesis pinball titles." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (August 1994).

Notable Quotable:

"Spidersoft made the decision to release a straight port of the Amiga version. As a result the graphics, sound, and table selection are identical to the original. In fact, the only visual differences I could see between the two versions were clearly caused by censorship rather than technical demands . . . When you compare *Pinball Dreams* to its superior sequel, *Pinball Fantasies*, you quickly realize that so much more could be done to make the game more varied and exciting. For example, all four tables only feature two flippers and none have ball traps or cages that are typical of the more sophisticated real-life tables . . . As with so many retro games, enjoyment of *Pinball Dreams* is tied to nostalgia. If you owned it and loved it before, you'll no doubt be able to forgive the game's flaws. To longtime fans, just hearing Olof Gustafsson's fantastic music will feel like a warm, familiar hug, but it's a product of its time." – Boxed Pixels (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)



Pinball Fantasies

Publisher: GameTek.
Developer: Spidersoft LTD.
Game Type: Pinball, 1–8 players (alternating).
Year: 1995.

A sequel to *Pinball Dreams*, *Pinball Fantasies* features four themed tables, each with solid gameplay: Partyland, set in an amusement park; Speed Devils, centered around racecar driving; Billion Dollar Gameshow, featuring a grinning gameshow host and a pair of beauties; and Stones 'N Bones, a spooky haunted house. Using the pair of flippers at the bottom of the playfield, you will aim the ball at various passageways, hit the ball up ramps and into bumpers and tunnels, knock the ball into targets to spell out words to enable bonuses and other features, and more. Unlike *Pinball Dreams*, which has fewer table features, three of the four pinball games have an extra flipper higher up on the playfield.

As in most good pinball sims, you can push a button to nudge or shake the table. If you do this too much, you will tilt the game and lose your ball. You can select three or five balls, and you can angle the table for an easier (small tilt) or harder (steep tilt) game. The action is viewed from overhead and scrolls vertically (and to a lesser extent horizontally) to display the entire table. Based on the 1992 Amiga game. In the Game Boy version "Billion Dollar Gameshow" is called "Million Dollar Gameshow." The Atari Jaguar port has slower ball movement.

Fun Fact: In 2002, *Pinball Challenge Deluxe* was released in Europe for the Game Boy Advance. It featured both *Pinball Dreams* and *Pinball Fantasies*.

Memories: Like even most video game fans, I far prefer authentic pinball to video pinball, but there are some console pinball games I have enjoyed quite a bit over the years, including *Midnight Magic* for the Atari 2600, *Pinball* for the Intellivision, *Crüe Ball* for the Genesis, and *Alien Crush* and *Devil's Crush* for the TurboGrafx-16. Far and away the best TV pinball is *Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection* for the Nintendo Wii. Not only does it include such awesome machines as *Gorgar* (1979), *Black Knight* (1980), and *FunHouse* (1990), it has excellent ball physics and motion controls that do a great job approximating real pinball action. *Pinball Dreams*, *Pinball Fantasies*, and *Super Pinball: Behind the Mask* for the SNES are fairly realistic for their time, but some will argue that they could have used more fantasy elements.

Notable Quotable:
"The four available tables . . . each have their own strengths and especially their unique and obvious weaknesses . . . The music is generally weak. *Pinball Fantasies* does not begin to simulate the effects of physics on real pinball . . . an absurd scarcity of bumpers and drop targets . . . still, shockingly, the best pinball simulation available for the SNES." – *Electronic Games* (July 1995)

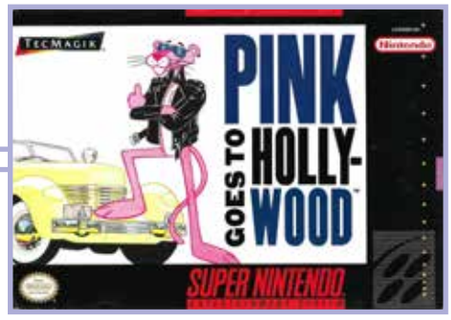
Notable Quotable:
"The ball physics can be a little quirky . . . One example is that if your ball just touches the top of the main side bumpers, it will act as if it got pushed upwards. The extra speed of the ball seems to come out of nowhere. Sometimes, the ball defies logic as it gets pushed around certain areas of certain tables. An example of this is if you use all of the plunger's power in Billion Dollar Game Show, the ball will hesitate on the ramp, then suddenly get pushed over so that it actually makes it through. In Stones Bones, the ball can actually slow down as it rolls across your flippers. Not sure why. I also felt that this game suffers from the problem of having the camera a little too close to the table. This means your reaction times are naturally reduced because you get less time to see more of the table . . . Graphically, this game is a bit of a disappointment. Some of the art for the menu screen has that 'done in MS Paint' feel to it. Overall, the animations were low quality. For each table, the art isn't much better . . . It has a very generic feel to it. It's as if someone told the artist that they wanted, say, a racing car on the table somewhere and some stock art was thrown in." – FreezeNet (www.freezenet.ca)

Insider Insight:
If you thought arcade games were few and far between during the mid-'90s, try locating a pinball machine! Fortunately, the favorite pastime left the arcade only to find itself playable on the medium that booted it from the arcade scene in the first place. Oh, the irony!

Regardless, I was happy to play video pinball in the absence of the real thing. *Pinball Fantasies*' prequel, *Pinball Dreams*, was a favorite of mine, so it was natural that I would want to try out the new tables in *Pinball Fantasies*. While it wasn't the best pinball title, I was so desperate for a new pinball experience I would play just about anything with the word "pinball" attached to it. If you squinted your eyes while playing *Pinball Fantasies*, it really wasn't so bad . . . – Michael Thomasson

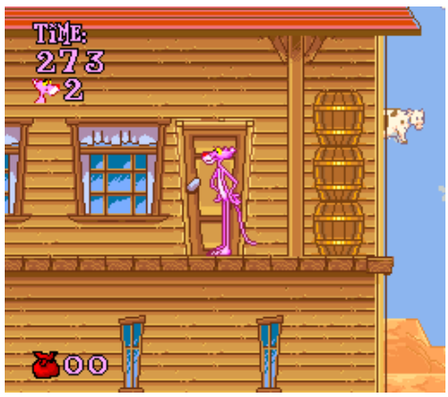
Pink Goes to Hollywood

Publisher: TecMagik.
Developer: Manley & Associates.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.



During his first Hollywood audition, longtime TV star Pink Panther spoils a scene starring Inspector Clouseau, prompting Pink's disgruntled nemesis to chase him through a variety of different movie sites, including Pinkenstein (a castle), Pink Beard (underwater and on a ship), Pinkinhood (the Sherwood Forest), Polterpink (a haunted house), Jungle Pink (a rain forest), Pink Ranger (the Old West), and Cat on a Hot Pink Roof. The "overworld," which is viewed from the side like the rest of the game, is called Honey, I Shrunk the Pink, and this house acts as a hub for each of the levels, many of which are hidden.

Pink can run, swim, and jump (over gaps, on enemies, and on moving platforms), and he can use a variety of weapons, including a fly swatter, bug spray, a hammer, a bowling ball, and a dog (which is used like the fly swatter). These weapons are used for fending off such enemies as rats, cats, ghosts, dinosaurs, archers, cowboy boots, sharks, bouncing bones, flying food, and rolling rocks. Pink also bounces on trampolines for sky-high jumps, rides a mine cart, ducks under enemies and obstacles, and shimmies up and down ropes and chains.



As a cartoon platformer *Pink Goes to Hollywood* is fairly typical, but the game does distinguish itself with various tokens Pink can find and use for riding a magic carpet, floating via an umbrella (which takes you straight up), building a bridge, creating a staircase, and more. In addition, the "Pink Panther Theme Song" plays throughout and Pink is nicely animated, showing off his unique walking style, which can only be described as an ambling gait. Also released for the Genesis.

Memories: I grew up watching the old Saturday morning *Pink Panther* cartoons, and I loved the long-forgotten Pink Panther cereal (which was something like pink Frosted Flakes), so I enjoyed *Pink Goes to Hollywood* as much for its nostalgia factor as anything else. I was especially taken by the game's cartoon-like graphics. On the other hand, I was never much of a fan of the live action comedy-mystery Inspector Clouseau (a French police detective) movies, most of which featured Pink Panther in the opening and closing credit sequences.

Notable Quotable:

"The crisp, cartoony graphics are the highlight of an otherwise ordinary platform challenge . . . Other than the perpetually entertaining musical score, the programmers were stingy in regard to the audio effects, which are not overly impressive. My main gripe concerns the harsh controls. One must employ near-perfect timing when dealing with the majority of enemies. [You should] react a split-second early in order to counteract the sluggish controls." – Kevin Oleniacz (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:

The second game I found on my first-ever retro video game hunting expedition (circa 2010) was *Pink Goes to Hollywood*. It was also the first game I had to clean for it to work. When I purchased it, I did not know it had some jelly-like gunk stuck inside. Luckily, I had already purchased the screwdriver bits for opening games to thoroughly clean them. After a little spraying and elbow grease (luckily none of the gunk was on the actual circuit board) I got the cartridge cleaned up and put it back together. With fingers crossed, I put the game in the SNES, hoping it would start. I breathed a sigh of relief as I was greeted by the familiar sounds of that unforgettable "Pink Panther Theme" by Henry Mancini.

Getting relaxed, I sat back and began my first play of *Pink Goes to Hollywood*. The graphics looked great and the controls were responsive. Like *Pugsley's Scavenger Hunt*, *Pink Goes to Hollywood* quickly became one of those "where do I go?" type of games. While this can generally be fun in a video game, *Pink Goes to Hollywood* was more frustrating than entertaining. It was made worse by my inability to understand how the special items were used. Even with a lot of effort and patience I never fully understood how all the items worked, and I still stink at the game. I would like to think after twenty-five years of experience I would be better at classic games. Sadly, sometimes we learn that frustrating is frustrating, no matter your age. – Zoe K. Howard

Pinocchio, Disney's

Publisher: Disney Interactive/Virgin Interactive Entertainment.
Developer: Virgin Studios London/ Walt Disney Feature Animation Services.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

Based on the 1940 feature film—which is one of the two or three best Disney movies of all time—*Pinocchio* is a beautifully drawn, beautifully animated game that takes players through nine levels (plus some secret levels), including An Actor's Life for Me, Escape from Pleasure Island, The Search for Monstro, and Escape from Monstro. In most of the areas, players guide the smiling, skipping, wooden puppet-turned-boy. He will walk through town on his way to school; grab ledges; make his way through the ocean and Monstro; push barrels to jump up on them to higher platforms; grab fish tails to reveal items; dodge rocks, spikes, thrown firecrackers, and other obstacles; and avoid and use a spin-kick attack against such enemies as bullies, crabs, geese, and gulls. Pinocchio will also ride a raft, a roller coaster, a manta ray, and a turtle.

In the Puppet Show level, Pinocchio must mimic the moves of puppets—a large SNES controller pops up onscreen to show you what buttons to push. In the Lampside Setting level, players guide Jiminy Cricket as he swats moths with his umbrella. Despite an uneven level of difficulty, *Pinocchio* is a playable game that fans of the film will appreciate, especially from a visual standpoint. Plus, it includes decent instrumental versions of "When You Wish Upon a Star" and other songs. In the Genesis version, a Genesis controller pops up during the Puppet Show level. The SNES game has stronger music and sound effects, and slightly superior visuals. The Game Boy cart is similar to its console counterparts, but has just seven levels.

Fun Fact: For his 1978 solo album, Gene Simmons of KISS covered "When You Wish Upon a Star." It was the eleventh and final song on the record. Billy Joel and Linda Ronstadt also covered the tune.

Memories: My second favorite Disney movie, *Pinocchio* blows my mind every time I see it. Not only is the animation drop-dead gorgeous, but the film is funny, exciting, and emotional. I love the music from *The Little Mermaid*—my all-time favorite Disney movie—but *Pinocchio* boasts the best original song in the history of cinema: "When You Wish Upon a Star," sung by Cliff Edwards (voicing Jiminy Cricket).

Notable Quotable:
"An okay game with some very good graphics . . . music has an almost MIDI-like quality to it. It's very basic while also sounding good . . . Level design is okay for the most part, except for a few times that give you blind jumps . . . You can probably beat this game in one sitting. The only real hard parts are the roller coaster and rafting segments that give you specified times to jump and duck, sometimes with very little room for error." – GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:
"The gameplay is rudimentary platform action, and the weak controls give you almost nothing to do besides walking and jumping. With stiff characters and undetailed backgrounds, the graphics are like those you saw in mediocre 1993 games. The music simplifies the movie's classic soundtrack, and the cartoony sound effects desperately cry out for some voices . . . What a shame that such a long-awaited game, with such a famous story as a foundation, should turn out to be so disappointing. This wooden game never comes to life." – *GamePro* (January 1997), referring to the near identical Genesis version of the game.

The Pirates of Dark Water

Publisher: Sunsoft.
Developer: Sunsoft.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Much different than its Genesis counterpart, which is a hack-and-slash platformer, *The Pirates of Dark Water* for the SNES is a beat-'em-up patterned after such games as *Final Fight* and *Streets of Rage*. It is a solid, good-looking title with big sprites, but it does not really add anything new to the genre. As Prince Ren (the blond hero and heir to the throne), Tula (the gorgeous heroine), or Ioz (a fortune-hunting ex-pirate)—each of whom varies in strength, speed, recovery, and jumping ability—players battle their way through a steady flow of enemies (mostly pirates) using such moves as punches (including heavy punches), flying knees, spinning kicks, and head butts. You can also block, grab, throw, and execute dash attacks.

The characters fight with a similar style, but each has a few unique moves, including one special move: spinning kick (Ren), energy barrier (Tula), and spinning punch (Ioz). As with *Final Fight*, using a special move consumes some of your energy. While combat is the primary focus of the game, most of the levels incorporate such obstacles as chasms, spikes, and/or falling rocks. At one point, the game takes on the persona of a rapid-fire, side-scrolling shooter, with players flying through the air, shooting at a giant winged beast, but this is the only deviation from the formula. Stages include Dragons Maw, Atani Palace, Pandawa, and Andorus.

The storyline revolves around the watery world of Mer, which is threatened by the deadly Dark Water. To save Mer, our heroes must find the Treasures of Rule, which is also sought after by the evil pirate lord, Bloth. *The Pirates of Dark Water* is based on the Hanna-Barbera cartoon of the same name, which ran for two seasons from 1991–1993.

Notable Quotable:

"Good looks . . . Check this game out if you don't already have *Final Fight*, *Streets of Rage 2*, or *Double Dragon*. It's a slugfest and killing spree until you find the treasure and save the land of Mer." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Unlike the darker Sega game, the SNES installment sticks closer to the brighter palette of the show. Familiar locations from the cartoon make an appearance and its most popular villains comprise the bosses. Overall, the game is fairly decent." – Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Boring brawler that isn't worth spending too much time on. It followed the standard formula of every brawler out at the time, which was just beating the hell out of everything on screen until you made it to a boss and then do it all over again until the credits rolled. It moved way too slow, looked and sounded awful, and was sadly not even worth a pity rental. The Genesis version, however, is a much more interesting game." – Retrovania (www.retrovania.net)

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure

Publisher: Activision.
Developer: Redline Games.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

A beautifully animated, nicely scored, graphically detailed sequel to the 1982 Atari 2600 classic (*Pitfall!*), *The Mayan Adventure* casts players in the role of Harry Junior, exploring jungles, ruins, and temples while trying to find his father (Pitfall Harry, of course). As in the original, players run, jump, climb, search for treasure, and swing on vines, but this game adds crawling, bungee jumping, entering doors, crossing pegs and cords, riding zip lines, springing off webs, pulling levers, battling bosses (mostly jaguars), riding a mine and a skate car, and using weapons (against such enemies as skeletons, jaguars, hawks, and vapor ghosts), including a whip-sling, stones, exploding stones, and a boomerang. And unlike *Pitfall!*, this game features true scrolling. Mayan lands to journey through include Jungle of Ceiba, Tazamul Mines, Xibalba Falls, Lost City of Copan, Copan Temple, Lakamul Rain Forest, Yaxchilan Lagoon, Balankanche Mine, Tikal Ruins, and Tikal Temple.

The action has an overall linear feel to it, but there are puzzles, bonus mini-games, and hidden areas. The elaborate animation causes a slight delay in the controls, and the blind jumps and small, swarming, regenerating enemies (such as dragonflies, monkeys, and spiders) can be a pain, as Harry Jr. can't throw straight up or down. This is nevertheless a fine adventure—it is certainly superior to the horrible NES game, *Super Pitfall*. As a nice bonus, the original *Pitfall!* is hidden in the game. (You can read about *Pitfall!* in my first book, *Classic Home Video Games, 1972–1984*.)

Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure was also released for the Game Boy Advance, Genesis, Jaguar (with a welcome save feature), Sega CD (with CD-quality sound, better graphics, and extra stages), and 32X (with better graphics and extra stages).

Notable Quotable:

"This version plays like Indiana Jones in fast-forward, as Pitfall Harry Jr. executes his derring-do amid lush jungle backgrounds, stirring music, and pumped-up sound effects." – Bob Strauss (*Entertainment Weekly*, December 9, 1994)

Notable Quotable:

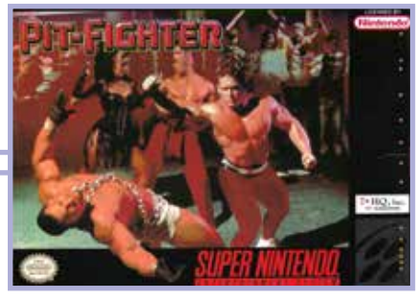
"Now that you've seen the commitment that Activision has put into restoring this classic game, you almost want to see what it'll do with *River Raid*, its other smash for the 2600. But until then you'll have plenty of fun with this title, which is challenging and entertaining at the same time. While other action/adventure games stumble, *Pitfall* doesn't take a pratfall." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Insider Insight: Of all the Atari 2600 games I played growing up, the *Pitfall* titles were the ones that I played continuously. They never grew tiresome or boring, and I always went back to them to better my game-playing skills. When I heard that a third game was coming a full decade after *Pitfall II: The Lost Caverns*, I was stoked to say the least! It was not really a reminiscent moment, as I still played the game regularly. To tell the truth, I had been humming *Pitfall II*'s theme song just about daily. I still think that is the catchiest tune in video game history.

While Pitfall Harry's newest outing was not as good as the originals, *The Mayan Adventure* was a solid game and featured some of the most colorful and well-animated sprites this animator had ever witnessed in a video game. Sadly, the reaction time was a bit slow, which made life-and-death situations that much more dangerous. There were many hidden secrets to be found in the game, including one that allowed the original *Pitfall!* game to be played on the Super Nintendo. BONUS! – Michael Thomasson

Pit-Fighter

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: THQ.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



In *Pit-Fighter*, gamers enter an underground fighting tournament as one of three fighters, each capable of pulling off a Super Move that you earn after successfully completing a match. Buzz is a former pro wrestler with a "grip of iron" and a killer body slam. Veteran pit-fighter Ty is an expert kickboxer who can execute a flying deadly double kick. Fast and agile, Kato is a master of the flying dragon style of karate, and he delivers a deadly dragon punch. Each fighter can punch, kick, block, duck, pick up enemies, jump up, do jump kicks, jump away from the enemy, and do a rolling cartwheel. You fight against renegade warriors, hooded executioners, and leather-clad bikers with names like Executioner, CC Rider, Chainman Eddie, Angel, and Ultimate. You receive full health when you achieve certain scores (50,000, 150,000, 350,000, and 600,000) and you get bonuses for knockouts. There are ten regular rounds (which include grudge matches), plus a final battle against the mysterious Masked Warrior.

Although it offers the same playable fighters and the same simultaneous feature (two players can fight each other or team up against the computer), *Pit-Fighter* for the SNES is far inferior to the Genesis version. The weapons have been removed, the difficulty level is unreasonable, and the controls are terribly sluggish, resulting in the worst fighter for the console—even worse than *Rise of the Robots*. The original coin-op *Pit-Fighter* (Atari, 1990), which offered three-player action and had larger characters, was the first arcade fighting game to feature digitized graphics, predating *Mortal Kombat* by two years. Also released for the Game Boy and Lynx.

Fun Fact: An Atari 7800 port of *Pit-Fighter* by Imagitec Design was in the works back in the day, but the project was cancelled before the game was completed.

Notable Quotable:

"It has zero options . . . not even a sound check . . . The graphics look sharper than the Genesis, but only serve to emphasize how blocky and poorly animated the digitized characters are . . . It's hard to tell what's happening as the fighters cavort with each other, often falling down without making contact . . . One time I scored a perfect zero because I couldn't even get off a punch. Instead of health bars there are numbers that count down as fighters take damage. After defeating an enemy and progressing to the next level your life meter doesn't even replenish . . . you get a single life and no continues . . . as far as I can tell, this [game] has no purpose." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com).

Notable Quotable:

"I wasn't a fan of *Pit-Fighter* in the arcade, and I'm not that into digitized sprites. But the SNES port is nothing short of a mockery of the original game. To fit *Pit-Fighter* on the cartridge, animations were dropped (in some cases to single frames), stages were reduced to fewer than 10 colors, characters were resized and redrawn so they look almost nothing like their arcade counterparts, the music was dropped, and the sound quality is garbled . . . If you want to see an example of a bad port, look to *Primal Rage*. If you want something that could hardly be considered the original game, there's *Pit-Fighter* . . . Everything about this port is bad, from the pathetic lack of color to the random image of the boss showing up between every three or so rounds. Half the time he says something, but the sound quality is so bad I can't make it out. The other half, he just kinda stares at me like an imbecile." – Racket Boy (www.racketboy.com)

Insider Insight:

At one time, there were—count 'em—three arcades on my street! Five years later . . . there were none (sigh). We did have Southland Bowling Lanes, which had a tiny game room inside that managed to survive the coin-op meltdown. It always had a pinball machine, a driving game of some sort, and room for only one more arcade game that rotated every few months. During fall 1990, Atari's *Pit-Fighter* made the rounds.

Growing up I ran with a mighty rough crowd, but never once did I give into peer pressure. As a result, I was often forced to fight my way out of a situation . . . and I became quite good at it. Although I wasn't the most built twenty-year-old at the time, I could hold my own—especially against my drunk and stoned peers. Where did I learn some of my best kickboxing moves? Why, from playing *Pit-Fighter* on my Super Nintendo, of course! – Michael Thomasson

Plok

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Taking place among colorful beaches, forests, coves, caverns, hills, and the like, *Plok* is a deep-but-cute, cartoonish, and humorous platformer, with a not-so-typical primary weapon: the title character's arms and legs, which can be thrown at the game's enemies, including flying mutant fleas, slime-spitting super fleas, tough sentry fleas, metal fish, and giant flowers. The assortment of quirky creatures includes several types of "Shprouts," some of which must be shot from behind. Bosses include such oddities as the Bobbins Brothers (failed circus acrobats), Penkinos (a troupe of inflatable magicians), Womack Spider (whose legs are his weak points), Rockyfella (who pops out of the ground), and The Flea Queen.

The game has a variety of obstacles to avoid, including flea gunge, logs, rocks, pebbles, spiky doorways, barbed wire, and spikes. Plok will encounter plenty of useful items as well, such as targets that alter the landscape when hit, shells for powering Plok's amulet (which makes him fight like a whirling tornado), speed blades that turn Plok into a spinning ball of steel, force field gems that protect Plok from harm, magic fruit that restores energy, floating platforms that carry Plok over dangerous gaps, and buddy hornets Plok can send out as missiles.

Plok can also dress up as his favorite movie characters to give him extra powers: Plocky (bigger boxing gloves and unlimited punching power), Squire Plok (blunderbuss gun), Cowboy Plok (handgun), and Rocketplok. As if that was not enough, he can drive a number of vehicles, including a unicycle, an off-road truck, a jet pack, a motorbike, a helicopter, a tank, a UFO, and a secret super-vehicle. At one point in the game you will play a black-and-white level as Grandpappy Plok.

It will probably take you at least a couple hours to beat Plok's nearly forty stages (except in Child's Play mode) even if you are good at it, but there are some hidden warps you can go through. Unfortunately, you can't save your progress via battery backup or passwords.

Notable Quotable:

"Created by John and Ste Pickford [a.k.a the Pickford brothers], two fairly well-known British video game designers, *Plok* is perhaps one of, if not the best, example of a cult classic Super Nintendo platformer . . . you've only got four attacks available at any time, because if you shoot them all too rapidly you'll be temporarily left with just a torso and a head while your body parts slowly fly back towards you. In this state, movement also becomes harder due to your obvious lack of feet, so it's sometimes best not to shoot all of your shots quickly . . . During missions where you have to destroy fleas, the goal is just that—destroy all fleas. You will not be allowed to leave the stage and progress to the next one until you do, so you're going to have to search high and low. Luckily, in most cases the levels are fairly linear, so you won't have to do that much exploring as almost all fleas are found on the main path . . . Plok has a great deal of control, being able to perform low and high jumps and crouch in addition to attacking, so while the game can be challenging at times, it rarely, if ever, feels cheap . . . great atmosphere . . . cartoony visuals . . . Plok will give his thoughts about the current situation while automatically moving between levels on the world map, and they're often pretty funny . . . The soundtrack is the cream of the crop. Composed by Tim and Geoff Follin, who are pretty much legendary for their work on certain Commodore 64 games, it's one of the absolute best on the SNES, and will leave you wondering quite often how some of these songs were even possible on the system's hardware . . . It's disappointing that *Plok* didn't sell well, because it was, and still is, one of the best platformers without a well-known character . . . Even Shigeru Miyamoto supposedly loves the game." – Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com)

Plok

Insider Insight:
When the Super Nintendo was at the height of its popularity, I was living in a basement apartment in Camden, New Jersey, with my friend, Thom. We partied a lot, and given we were college guys in the city one would think we might have had many undergraduate females coming into and hastily exiting our young lives . . . you know, leaving their underwear behind and whatnot.

Females, no. Female underwear, no. Video games and game consoles, yes. They came out of nowhere and went nowhere.

I was eleven years old when the Atari VCS version of *Berzerk* came out. I could describe to you in great detail the day I bought *Berzerk* at K-Mart. I am not nearly as clear on where the Super Nintendo in my college apartment came from. Not clear at all. I could not tell you if it was mine or Thom's. I could not tell you whatever became of it. Ditto the Genesis, Master System, and NES. They were just around. It was like grabbing a beer from the fridge. We were not "collectors." These systems were not flea market finds. A buddy would bring, say, a TurboGrafx-16 over to play *R-Type* for a couple hours and return for it four months later.

Our nights—whatever the hour—would conclude with a gaming session. *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II* were perennial favorites. Although any given contest in a fighting game has a winner and a loser (which these two games in particular would make abundantly clear), Thom and I had many spirited debates about the outcome of these contests. It got to the point where the violence was no longer simulated.

To restore our physical and mental health, we put the fighting games aside and made way for more traditional video games: *Alex Kidd in Miracle World*, *Gunstar Heroes*, *Contra III*, and the like. Strangely, even games that did not involve nor invite direct competition became heated.

Enter *Plok*. Where did it come from? Why and how did it come from? It simply appeared one day. *Plok* is a childish platformer, as close to *Super Mario Bros.* as you can get without calling it that. But whereas a stage in *SMB* can take a few minutes to get through, *Plok* consists of bite-sized morsels of platforming.

Plok's stages are simple, and also enormously frustrating, and after only a few cans of Busch (in those days $4.99 for a *case* of beer), impossible. Three buttons: jump, somersault jump, and shoot your arms and legs at stuff (á la *Rayman*). Under the influence, this control layout turns into *Steel Battalion*.

Oh, how we wanted to kill each other. Why did you just die? I'll kill you! How did you finish that stage? I'll kill you! Back and forth went that purple-and-gray controller. We would hand it off, then throw it on the ground, then pick it up off the floor, then throw it at the TV, then rip it out of the console and throw it across the room, plug it in, throw the cartridge, throw the console, throw cans of beer, and throw each other to the ground. Good times.

Plok is not an easy name to remember. We eventually just started calling it "GODDAMMIT." Make no mistake: this is a quality video game. It is not a licensed quickie with bad collision detection and cheap hits galore. There is just something about it that gets under your skin. "I've been diddled!" indeed. – Jeff Belmonte

Pocky & Rocky

Publisher: Natsume.
Developer: Natsume.
Game Type: Overhead Free-Roaming Shooter, 1–2 Players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Set in a cartoonish Far East and viewed from a top-down perspective, *Pocky & Rocky* has players guiding either a girl named Pocky or a goblin named Rocky the Raccoon through six levels of villages, forests, castles, and other such areas. In rapid-fire fashion, Pocky throws magic cards while Rocky hurls magic leaves at scores of snakes, zombies, skeletons, jack-o-lanterns, bazooka men, and other goblin enemies that approach from all sides. Picking up blue balls powers up your weapon with wide shots while red balls give you fireball shots.

Each character can move and fire in eight directions, and each can collect bombs that damage surrounding enemies. The characters have close range attacks as well; Pocky uses a magic stick, while Rocky shakes his booty to swat enemies with his tail. Holding down the button creates a spin attack for Pocky and turns Rocky into an invincible stone statue. Each character also has a sliding maneuver for running from enemies or escaping from traps. In two-player mode, sliding into the other player sends him or her spinning all over the screen, attacking enemies. At certain points you can ride the Mad Dog, who jumps around defeating enemies. A "help man" hides in each of the game's six stages. When he appears he will drop items, such as a health, bombs, or a protection shield.

Despite cute visuals and goofy bosses, *Pocky & Rocky*, which plays more like a hardcore shooter than a quirky character game, has intense action and is fiendishly difficult, even with unlimited continues. It is a sequel to the 1986 Japanese arcade game, *KiKi KaiKai*, developed by Taito.

Notable Quotable:
"It's strange for such a large and undeniably slick game to be marred by one very annoying yet easily-solved point. Since this point affects the whole way the game plays, it's rather important: you can't lock your direction of fire." – *Game Master* (1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Everything is cartoony and adorable, but damn if it doesn't slap you across the face a few times with its difficulty . . . this certainly isn't a bad thing . . . it's good that it can really test your skills with its rather simple gameplay. It's a very enjoyable shoot-'em-up. If you've got some time to spend with a friend, and you're in the mood for something charming, play *Pocky & Rocky*. Just be prepared to get mauled with many deaths." – ProJared (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"What appears to be on the surface a 'cutesy' little kid's game is one of the most original, fun, and challenging games around . . . After each boss is defeated, there is a cinema setting up the next stage. The graphics are excellent, especially in these cinemas, with running conversations between the two. Each level is extremely challenging and well-constructed . . . a beautiful musical score. The oriental music goes perfectly with each level." – *Electronic Games* (June 1993)

Insider Insight:
Pocky & Rocky was one of several games my cousin introduced me to, and it was and still is one of the hardest SNES games I have ever played. But there is just something about it that makes it such an enjoyable game. Couch co-op is something that is not utilized as much today as it was back then, and the odd quirkiness that is *Pocky & Rocky* provided me and my cousins countless hours of playtime. The only problem was, we absolutely sucked at it. To this day I have not gotten past level two. Although the game is extremely difficult, it is a masterpiece that has become a cult classic. – Eric Perez

Pocky & Rocky 2

Publisher: Natsume.
Developer: Natsume.
Game Type: Overhead Free-Roaming Shooter, 1–2 Players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

A hard-to-find game, *Pocky & Rocky 2* plays a lot like the rapid-fire *Pocky & Rocky*, with gamers walking and shooting in eight directions at enemies that approach from all sides. This time there are nine levels of play (as opposed to six): Pocky's Practice Stage, Exotic Country Road, October Fields, Bridge over Kappa River, Demon's Corridor, Winter Wonderland, Demon Island, Dragon in the Sky, and Demon's Castle. In addition, Pocky is given a variety of partners to play alongside other than just Rocky (who throws magic leaves), including Little Ninja, Bomber Bob, Tengy, Scarecrow, Digger, and Ottobot.

Depending on the character selected, these helpmates enable players to fly, lift boulders, hurl spiked balls, throw ninja stars, travel underground, become a pogo stick, throw sickles, open locked chests without a key, throw bouncing leaves, and more. If there is no second player, the CPU plays the partner. Pocky—whom player one always controls—maintains her stick and card weapons, but the sliding maneuver has been removed. Helpful items you can acquire include keys (for opening chests and doors), armor, weapon power-ups, extra lives, and strategy books that tell you how to beat the bosses. Like its more simplistic though more difficult predecessor, *Pocky & Rocky 2* is fierce, fun, and deceptively cute. Followed by *Pocky & Rocky with Becky* for the Game Boy Advance, which introduces a priestess to the action.

Notable Quotable:

"Very nice . . . I thoroughly enjoyed their first adventure and this one tops it. It's cool that there are new characters for Pocky to team up with, each having their own special abilities. The game plays superbly and is a blend of an adventure and shooting all in one. The bosses are corny looking, but that's part of the appeal. Lots of surprises, plenty of enemies, and hidden stuff add up to one really fun game." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay has been left mostly intact . . . The main characters can still fire an endless supply of projectiles . . . The first stage is actually optional since it's a training stage . . . Gone is the amazingly arcade-like quality that dominated the first game . . . It's still a partially linear game, except now in a few stages there are forks in the road (still leading to the same destination) as well as doors (locked and unlocked) to enter from and stores to buy items . . . Visually it's about on par with the last game, only with lots of new areas for you to traverse . . . brimming with charm, personality, a feeling of being in a differently cultured world . . . The soundtrack is good, but not quite as good as the first game's." – StarBlog (starboy91.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight:

I have memory problems associated with this super rare and super valuable gaming gem. I am not talking about game memory, either—I mean I have no idea how I got *Pocky & Rocky 2*. Almost every game I have I remember—either specifically or vaguely—how I got it, but this one I draw a complete blank on. My best guess was when I got it in that brief golden age of pawn shop finds between 2000–2006. It has a generic red price tag of $14.99 on it. Some other scuffs and marks, but no clear indication.

And not only that, but for possibly a whole decade, I could not even remember *owning* the game! If you had a game that was worth over $250 now you would surely remember it, right? But for the longest time I'd go looking through my SNES collection and several times go, "Oh wow, I DO have that game! But where did I get it?" – Jeff Lawhead

Populous

Publisher: Acclaim.
Developer: Bullfrog Productions.
Game Type: World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

Charlton Heston may have portrayed Moses in *The Ten Commandments* (1956), but you get to play a god in *Populous* for the Super Nintendo. Your goal is to eliminate from the face of your world the followers of Evil. You are given the power to command the forces of nature. You can create earthquakes, floods, volcanoes, and other catastrophes, and you can even turn fertile plains into barren wastelands or oceans into fertile plains. Omnipotent as you are, there is a limit to your powers. It all depends on how many followers are at your command. You use these people to build towns, raise crops, multiply, invade the enemy towns, and destroy crops. Once the forces of Good significantly outnumber the forces of Evil you should call for Armageddon—a final doomsday battle.

There are 989 worlds in the universe of *Populous* (compared to 500 in the Genesis and computer versions). Ten types of terrain are used, including grassy plains, rock and lava, desert, and snow and ice. Three modes of play are available: Tutorial, Conquest, and Custom. Custom mode lets you change landscapes, jump to new worlds, and set the computer against itself. You can even play the part of the Evil deity. *Populous*, which is a port of the 1989 Amiga computer game programmed by Peter Molyneux, is similar to *SimCity*, but with an isometric viewpoint. The Japanese version was a launch title for the Super Famicom. Followed by *Populous: The Beginning* (various) and other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"If you like a test of strategy, *Populous* is an excellent choice. Gameplay's slow and at times tedious but it's very addictive, and once you get the hang of what's going on the lastability is very good." – *N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Populous* is one of those games that you either like or hate. I don't really mind so much the concept behind the game, but the overall execution is just a little too slow for a blaster veteran like myself. It's not a good game or a bad game in my book—it's just *Populous*." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The SNES version, like all console versions, suffers from the lack of a mouse; while it is certainly possible to adapt, scrolling with the d-pad is cumbersome and laborious. All actions can be accessed through a string of shortcuts, but no contortions can match a mouse's swiftness in the heat of battle. Even worse, there is no two-player functionality, a big loss given how much better it is than the base game. Still, it offers quaint twists such as Famicoms and Game Boys on its Promised Land levels (which come with the game). Wild West is now 'Japanesque,' an aesthetically sleeker and politically less problematic setting (samurai replace 'red Indians' as rivals), and Block Land is now Cake Land (perhaps to avoid copyright infringement). It also inexplicably includes an extra world based on the Three Little Pigs. In a familiar attempt to over-sell their product, *Nintendo Power* praised the 'life-like' graphics on the SNES, and though they are certainly cleaner, they are noticeably shrunk down, most clearly in the HUD." – Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:
I have many good memories of creating empires, creating usable land, and crushing my enemies in this, the grandfather of "god games." There was nothing like this game when it was released; it bordered on blasphemous, even drawing heavy scrutiny from my parents when I explained the concept. But it was my best friend, Mark, who really gave me an appreciation for the game. While I had struggled with even intermediate levels, Mark came over after school one day and showed me how to change functions in the options menu. This was, literally, a game changer! I could change the landscape, give myself new powers, weaken my enemies by default, and really customize this virtual world. It was the first time a game allowed me to change the rules. Sure, destroying mountains and creating earthquakes may have been the intended expression of these godlike powers, but to a fifteen-year-old kid, changing the rules of a video game without cheating was truly "godlike." – Andy Slaven

Porky Pig's Haunted Holiday

Publisher: Sunsoft.
Developer: Phoenix Interactive Entertainment.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

While thumbing through travel brochures and planning his next vacation, Porky Pig falls asleep. Instead of drifting away in blissful slumber, Porky's nightmares take him to Dry Gulch Creek Haunted Theme Park. Immersed physically in his own dreams, the famous stuttering cartoon pig must traverse six scary worlds: Haunted Woods, Dry Gulch Ghost Town, Atlantis, Abandoned Mines, The Alps, and The Castle. In each world Porky is confronted by a host of creatures and obstacles that go along with the respective themes, such as ghosts, prisoners, trains, owls, tumbleweeds, and fish.

Porky's primary method of attack is hopping on top of whatever gets in his way. Once he picks up a fruit bowl he can throw fruit at enemies. He spends much of his time walking and jumping, but certain levels require Porky to ride a raft, climb trees, glide through the air, float on underwater bubbles, and perform an assortment of other stunts. Weather conditions such as snow, rain, and fog will hinder his progress. A special Chaos Mapping System changes the weather each time you play. Each level has a boss at the end. Porky will have to perform special maneuvers not found in the standard gameplay to defeat these villains. For example, when confronted by Yosemite Sam, Porky must deflect his bullets with a frying pan.

Like *Tom and Jerry*, *Porky Pig's Haunted Holiday* was obviously created with younger gamers in mind. There are plenty of continues, save points, and health meter boosters throughout the game, and the levels are short and easy to finish. The bosses, though big and sometimes cleverly designed, are fairly easy to beat, and the controls are simple to learn. Speaking of controls, this game handles extremely well; maneuvering Porky is smooth and easy on the thumbs.

Those expecting the sarcastic, over-the-top wit of the Looney Toons classic cartoons will be disappointed, but this game does have some humor. Daffy Duck pops out of nowhere, scaring the heck out of Porky and propelling him like a rocket to an upper level he would not have otherwise been able to reach. There are also more subtle comic moments, such as in Dry Gulch Ghost Town, when little moose heads with gun barrels sticking out of their mouths fire bullets at Porky.

The music is pleasant enough, but it gets repetitive within each level. Most of the sound effects are excellent, with one curious exception: when Porky jumps on an object, kicking it off the screen, the same sound occurs whether this action causes him to lose an increment from his health meter or not. The voice effects could be fine-tuned a bit; there is not enough of Porky stuttering through words, and the few things he does say sound scratchy.

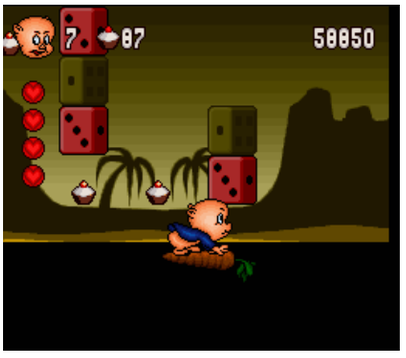
Notable Quotable:

"Warner Bros. cartoon fans will notice familiar sights like the two-headed vulture, a prancing dog, and bats with big eyes . . . The stage backgrounds are very artistic, and there are random weather effects and some impressive 3D scaling . . . Ironically, the worst-looking thing in the entire game is Porky himself, who appears somewhat pixelated. The music is amazing, and the digitized sound effects include Daffy Duck's maniacal laugh. The oversized bosses are memorable, including Yosemite Sam and a Ghost in a top hat. *Haunted Holiday* is definitely on the easy side, but that just makes it all the more appealing." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

One of the first games I found when I began collecting classic games and consoles in 2010, *Porky Pig's Haunted Holiday* set the tone with a well-crafted adventure with laughs that rival that of the classic Looney Tunes cartoons. Going out and finding games was fairly new to me at the time and I was never sure what to expect, so when I came across this game I was happy. I drove home eager to try out the finds I discovered while out that day. A quick cart cleaning later and I was off on this crazy ride.

While I was never big on the character of Porky Pig, no one could argue the comedy of his more frightening adventures, especially when Daffy Duck was involved in any way. My first impression of the game was that I had never seen a character in a platformer so big. It was a little jarring compared to games like *Super Mario Bros.* and *Mega Man*. What really captured me was the game's comedic nature mixed with an almost *Castlevania*-like gameplay. While the music wasn't anything special, the voices and sound effects more than made up for the lackluster soundtrack. Hearing Daffy Duck's maniacal laugh made me giggle every time. – Zoe K. Howard



Power Instinct

Publisher: Atlus.
Developer: Atlus.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Boasting nice graphics, good music, and responsive controls, *Power Instinct* for the Super NES—like its 1993 coin-op counterpart (also by Atlus)—is one of the more playable of the many *Street Fighter II* clones. Each gamer takes control of a *Street Fighter II*-like fighter in a series of one-on-one battles using a variety of *Street Fighter II*-like punches and kicks (weak and strong) and combination attacks to pummel one another until someone's health meter has expired. Modes of play include Practice, V.S., Life Attack (take on the entire cast with only one life meter), and Join-In (allows a second player to get in on the action at any time). Your goal, according to the game's storyline, is to win the tournament so you have the honor of ruling the Gogetsu Clan.

You select from eight fighters, each with several special moves—achievable by such *Street Fighter II*-style controller inputs as away, towards, and half-circle—and the ability to defend, dash, hold, throw, squat, jump, and double jump. Said fighters include Thin Nen (flashing thunder fist, freeze curse, oro ball wave, and thunder kick); Keith Wayne (knuckle bomber, spiral kick, lightning flash, and rolling cannon); Hattori Saizo (flashing dragon bomb, tsunami slash, dragon flaming flash, and blue frame slicer); Annie Hamilton (swani clash, rainbow barrier, Annie dynamic, and photon burst); Reji Oyama (thunder ball, flying dragon punch, thunder kick, and super spin kick); Angela Belti (whip attack, thunder roll, body attack, and smash kick); White Buffalo (arrow shot, flying elbow blow, charging buffalo, and smash tackle); and Goketsuji Otane (flying face attack, flying denture attack, shooting comet attack, air kick, heart bombs, and rainbow wall). There is also a boss, Goketsuji Oume, who is similar to Goketsuji Otane, but faster and with a different color palette.

Known in Japan as *Gōketsuji Family*, *Power Instinct* for the SNES was released the same year as the *Power Instinct 2* arcade game, which was ported to the Japanese PlayStation in 1995. The Mega Drive version of *Power Instinct* features a special Battle Royal mode.

Notable Quotable:

"The fighting genre's only denture-throwing grandma and good fighting control are enough to make this game a good choice for fighting fans. However, if you already own a good fighting game, there isn't enough new stuff to warrant laying down your money." – *Game Players* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"There's nothing particularly noteworthy about the game mechanics—features such as super bars and tag teams were nabbed from other games—but has featured one of the most bizarre casts in any fighting game ever. There's the evil granny who attacks with dentures. The giant anthropomorphic dog, a half-naked sumo kid, a magical girl straight out of a shoujo anime, a time-traveling cyborg chick, an old man who wields a cane, another evil grandma with a huge hairdo, and a scary-looking Amazon girl. Unlike *Waku Waku 7*, which wears its cartoonish goofiness on its shoulder, *Power Instinct* has an art style closer to typical Capcom and SNK fighting games, and almost seems to take itself seriously. At least, most of the time." – Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:
When I stumbled across *Power Instinct* during the mid-1990s, I told my mom I wanted it, not knowing what to expect, and I am glad that I took the chance to play it. I invited my best friend over to give the game a try and he picked up on it very quickly. He is not really big into fighting games, but this is one of the few he enjoyed. Anytime we played together our matches were always close. There were times he would win, there were times that I would win, so our games were never one-sided.

One night around March 2016, I rummaged through the Twin Galaxies website to see if anyone had put up a score for *Power Instinct*, and when I found the correct submission thread it was empty. I made sure to read the rules of submission, then proceeded to play the game for a score to enter into the website. I won't lie and say I managed to complete the game on my first try; it took me about five attempts to finish the game on its hardest difficulty. Two months after submitting the video of my gameplay for adjudication the score was approved.

Nobody can claim they are #1 when there is no competition. As it stands, it is just a score to me. If there were more participation for that game then it would mean a lot more. But I can say the fact that I finished the game for that score gives me satisfaction. – Paul Tesi

Power Moves

Publisher: Kaneko.
Developer: System Vision.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

One of the lesser *Street Fighter II* clones, *Power Moves* only lets players fight as one character in one-player mode: a generic American named Joe. The objective is to defeat a series of opponents in a series of one-on-one battles using a small variety of punches and kicks. You can also jump, throw, and block. After a win your fighter attributes increase, such as speed, strength, and defense, and a password becomes available. The password feature, which is unusual for a fighter, is useful since the opponents are quick and tough to beat.

In two-player mode, eight martial artists are available to control, each with two special moves: Joe (fireball, flying double upper), Nick (knife toss, breakdancing kicks), Reayon (dash punch, upper kick), Vagnad (spinning lariat, double head slam), Warren (tackle, spinning dropkick), Baraki (fire, rolling attack), Buoh (hair whip, teleport), and Gaoluon (blade toss, flash kick). The final character you will battle in the game is Ranker, a boss who does a ground attack and a thunder fist. As with *Fatal Fury: King of Fighters* (and unlike *Street Fighter II*), the fighters can move up and down (as opposed to just right and left), making it harder to be on the right plane to connect hits. There are also a couple bonus rounds in which you punch and kick targets.

The punching/kicking action is semi-quick and moderately entertaining (at least for someone who has not played numerous similar games), and the graphical detail of the various exotic locations (such as Hawaii and Kenya) is nice. Plus the seasons and weather change, and you can select the backgrounds (which are very cool). Special moves are hard to execute, the animation could use some polish, and gameplay is highly derivative. In terms of sounds the music is adequate, and you will hear typical grunting, punching, and kicking noises. Known in Japan as *Power Athlete*. Released for the Genesis as *Deadly Moves*.

Fun Fact: The back of the box calls *Power Moves* an "exciting action adventure game" that "recreates the explosiveness of international boxing."

Notable Quotable:

"A mediocre fighting game. Not bad enough to be considered worthless or unplayable . . . Side-stepping and stat building features are quite novel for its day, but core gameplay feels a bit bland." – DTM Rambles (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"This game has got to be the absolute worst fighting game I have ever played on any platform . . . pitiful combat . . . There are some special moves, but most of them are just ripped from other characters in other, better fighting games." – Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

Power Piggs of the Dark Age

Publisher: Titus Software.
Developer: Radical Entertainment.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

When you boot up this hard-to-find game, you will see three pig heroes on the title screen: a fat guy wearing a too-small yellow shirt, flanked by a female archer and a bespectacled male wielding a bow staff. Surprisingly, you can only control Bruno, he of the too-small shirt. Bruno battles his way through eight strange, colorful, cartoonish, medieval worlds: Beautiful Downtown Pigg, West Blowhole Forest, Dark Age Donut, The Lost City of Swine, North Blowhole Forest, Gilbert's Donut Factory, The Road to Wolff Castle, and The Wizzard of Wolff's Castle. Bruno swings his sword at humanoid wolves dressed as knights, bowmen, and the like. He can also throw donuts at enemies and butt slam crates to reveal items.

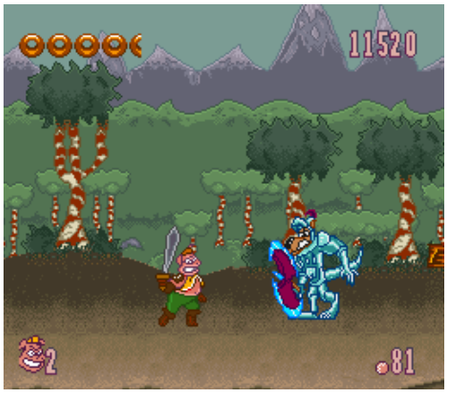
The platforming action feels floatier than most games of this type, thanks in large part to the liberal use of blowholes. These holes, which appear throughout the game, emit gusts of wind that impede Bruno's progress or send him to otherwise unreachable areas. Bruno also rides moving platforms and dodges projectiles. The platforming action is mediocre at best, but the game's sense of humor, including wacky sound effects, may appeal to fans of *Earthworm Jim*.

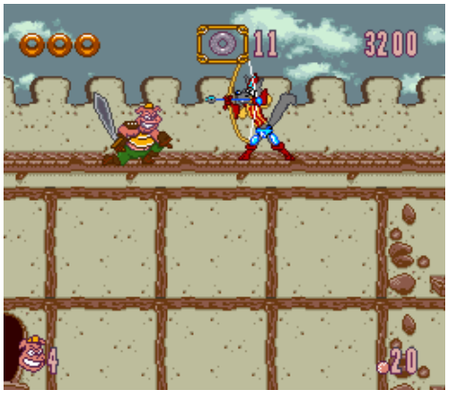
Notable Quotable:

"*Power Piggs* is a stiff, lifeless 2D platformer that went largely ignored by everyone with half a brain . . . the graphics are lousy . . . There are some pleasantly cartoony sprites here and there, such as a kung-fu practicing court jester, but otherwise it's substandard. Your character, Bruno, has a few good expressions at his disposal, but he's got a generally ugly and garish look about him . . . Constantly re-used backgrounds certainly don't help either . . . spectacular music. It has this odd, epic quality about it; not necessarily connected to a swords-and-sorcery film, but more like some odd hyper-realistic movie from the 1970s. It's great stuff. But that's where the good audio ends; every time you attack an enemy, he lets loose the same 'UGH!' sound effect." – Ian Pugh (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

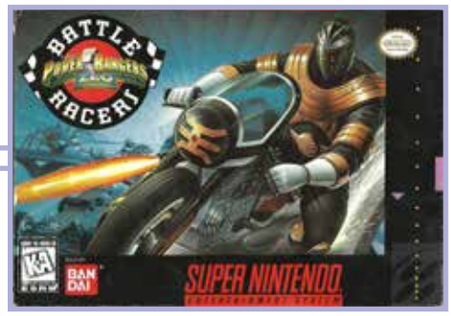
The game feels unfinished and lacking, but has some original ideas and is fun enough that I like it despite the incomplete feel . . . The levels are quite large, with a main path you have to follow that often involves having to find a hidden path . . . You do not just run right in this game, you go in every direction. There are also no instant-death pits, which is great; there are some spike beds, but they only do damage, they don't instantly kill you . . . Whether or not you like the game will likely depend in large part how much you enjoy the way the blowholes work. I found the concept fun. It's somewhat original as implemented here, and floating around in the air is fun . . . There is one frustrating element to the level designs . . . Checkpoints are often hidden just like items are . . . the artwork and design make it look like it's a licensed game based on some obscure early '90s cartoon." – Black Falcon Games (www.blackfalcongames.net)





(Saban's) Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers

Publisher: Bandai.
Developer: Natsume.
Game Type: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1996.



Loosely based on the *Power Rangers Zeo* television show, *Zeo: Battle Racers* is a *Super Mario Kart*-influenced game taking place over sixteen different courses filled with oil slicks, spinouts, ramps, and speed energizers. Depending on the Ranger or other character selected, players drive a hover craft, a dune buggy, a jet cycle, a quadrafighter, or a three-wheel chopper down twisting, turning streets, blasting and smashing other vehicles while racing toward the finish line. Characters include Zero Ranger 1–5 (Pink, Yellow, Blue, Green, and Red) and the Gold Ranger, plus Cog and King Mondo. Each character/vehicle is rated according to speed, grip, and acceleration. There are three difficulty levels from which to choose—novice, pro, and expert—and you can select automatic or manual transmission.

Single-player modes include Race Mode (compete against three other drivers on five tracks), Time Trial Mode (a practice mode), and vs CPU Mode, where you race for five laps on any of the sixteen tracks with five blaster balls per race to throw at other cars. There are five two-player modes, each featuring a split-screen view: Race Mode, 2P vs Mode, Point Race Mode (run over objects on the course to get points), Bumper Chase Mode (ram your opponents off the course), and Blaster Master Mode, which gives you unlimited firepower and ninety-nine seconds to beat your opponent.

Fun Fact: The back of the box features the following public service announcement: "This video game is designed to provide an exciting make believe journey through the world of Power Rangers Zeo. Please remember the difference between fantasy and reality. Do your fighting on the screen, not at home or at school."

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are sluggish and nonresponsive . . . the graphics have little to lift the quality level as they're pixelated and unrefined . . . in the later levels, players will become annoyed at the cheap design of the track, which instead of challenging the player more, tends to make play frustrating . . . many of the levels are similar to those in the Nintendo classic, *Mario Kart* . . . The entire course is outlined with a glowing red line on both sides of the track . . . This line is the no-cross line. It will be the worst enemy of the player who likes to curl the corners tight as they try to pass the slower racer in front of them. If any of the racers' wheels so much as cross an inch over the line, the player will plummet off the track into the seemingly bottomless pit. Just as in *Mario Kart*, however, you are rescued by the universal hovercraft that places you to a spot close to the proximity of where you went over the edge." – *GamePro* (1996)

Insider Insight:
By 1996, there were three Power Rangers games on the SNES: two action beat-'em-ups and a fighting game. Where was there left for the license to go? Why, a generic kart racer, of course! Seriously, if you look back on the history of certain licenses, fighting games and kart racers are what free-to-play match-three games are on app stores nowadays, with everything from the Muppets, to Looney Tunes, to Disney characters revving up their 50CC engines at some point.

Power Rangers Zeo: Battle Racers arrived in North America in fall 1996, but it was a game I did not play until early 1997, when I got a Nintendo 64, and a dearth of new SNES games meant I would try just about anything I had not heard of before because, hey, it was new to me. *Battle Racers* came onto my radar due to my rediscovery of the Power Rangers franchise and its new Zeo makeover. This was after I had been away from the series for a year or so, when I had tried to fit in with my pre-teen peers. This plan was quickly abandoned, as I would rather rush home to watch *Power Rangers* on TV and wait for the *Star Wars* re-releases to come out than play organized sports and smoke cigarettes.

If you take *Super Mario Kart*, remove the trappings of the Mushroom Kingdom, and replace it with brightly colored costumed characters riding motorcycles and karts, you would sum up *Power Rangers Zeo* pretty accurately. Viewed through modern eyes, the courses in screenshots look more like fan mods of *Mario Kart* than a game that was at one point sold in stores. It lacked the martial arts antics and giant monster fights that made the show such a hit and the other games guilty pleasures, but for one weekend *Battle Racers* kept me entertained, and I could not really ask more from it. – Blair Farrell

Prehistorik Man

Publisher: Titus Software.
Developer: Titus Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

A follow-up to *Prehistorik* and *Prehistorik 2* for home computers, *Prehistorik Man* puts you in the role of a short, fat, wild-haired, bulbous-nosed caveman named Sam, journeying through twenty-three gorgeous levels (the back of the box mistakenly says twenty-seven) of lush jungles, burning forests, crystal caverns, ape man villages, icy wastelands, and other areas. Graphical effects include fog, parallax scrolling, volcanoes erupting in the background, water reflections, and more.

Sam swings a club in circular fashion to battle the many dinosaurs and other creatures he will encounter, but he can also find such weapons as bombs, grenades, axes (which Sam throws in an arc), and spears (which can also be used as platforms). Sam can also jump on enemies. In addition, screaming will destroy every enemy onscreen. Defeated enemies release bones that can be traded in to a shop for such items as tips and advice, tickets to the next level, and save points, which are important, because continues are limited, and there is no password system or battery backup.

Certain levels have specific objectives, such as finding hidden items. To thoroughly search the areas, Sam will ride hang gliders, pogo sticks, and rafts, and he will ride on the backs of spiders and giant turtles. Sam's overall mission is to collect food for the villagers back home, including fudge bars, ice cream, cake, fruit, burgers, and fries. This is harder than it sounds, thanks in part to giant, *Contra*-like bosses. The Game Boy Advance version of *Prehistorik Man*, which has a different soundtrack, lacks the iceberg stage.

Notable Quotable:

"Here we have a game that's only 8-meg, yet it features a lengthy quest, amazing SFX, quality music, a personable main character, and play mechanics to burn. How is this possible? Through hard work. I highly recommend this game." – *GameFan Magazine* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Although *Prehistorik Man* doesn't bring anything new to the genre, there are many things the game does really well. Graphics are nicely detailed and really sharp—the animation is flawless, and Sam makes lots of funny gestures throughout the game. The gameplay is also rich and there is lots of stuff to try out. However, I can't help but flip back and forth as to whether I like it or not. I feel that *P. Man* lacks that sparkle capable of making it great—enemies are extremely generic, the stage layouts feel particularly lazy, and controls are too floaty and loose. At least the game is generous with lives and checkpoints, so the lousy controls won't really put you off. Nonetheless, there are fresh ideas in there (such as the glider) but they all suffer from a flawed execution. Still, underneath these niggles and inconsistencies lies a good and enjoyable, yet average, platform game." – Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Primal Rage

Publisher: Time Warner Interactive.
Developer: Bitmasters.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

Primal Rage takes the one-on-one fighting formula popularized by *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat* and replaces the humans and other combatants with dinosaurs and ape-like beasts. Each creature can perform upper and lower attacks and quick and fierce attacks, and each has unique special moves. Fighters include Armadon (snout gouge, tail whip, iron maiden, bed-o-nails, and mega charge); Blizzard (jab, left low punch, left uppercut, flying elbow, flying kick, mega punch, air throw, and freeze breath); Chaos (left jab, right cross, low punch, leg undercut, flying elbow, flying kick, grab-n-throw, ground shaker, and power puke); Diablo (chomp, whip, jumping kick, torch, hot foot, and inferno flash); Sauron (chomp, right leg whip, tail whip, earthquake stomp, cranium crusher, and primal scream); Talon (slash, chomp, slash kick, brain basher, pounce and flip, and frantic fury); and Vertigo (chomp, tail whip and jab, teleport, venom spit, and voodoo spell). Multiple hit combos inflict greater damage.

You can turn Game Gore (blood, eating people, and fatalities) on or off, but the 1994 Atari arcade original has more blood (pools of it, in fact), more animations (including post-victory celebrations), and more sound effects (the background characters cheer). Other options include a Training mode, the ability to handicap matches, round times, difficulty levels (1–16), and types of rounds (best two out of three, or one time winner-take-all). *Primal Rage* was also released for the PlayStation, 32X, Genesis, Game Boy, Game Gear, Saturn, 3DO, and Atari Jaguar CD. Followed by *Primal Rage II* (arcade, 1996).

Notable Quotable:
"*Primal Rage* is an imaginative concept, but the sluggish gameplay and less-than-spectacular graphics don't give this game the roar that *Killer Instinct* or *Virtua Fighter* possess. Still, this dino has teeth." – *GamePro* (September 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"In 1995, I opted for the SNES version (over the Genesis), but felt lukewarm about it. The characters are smaller than the arcade and the animation is slower. The hits lack impact and the blood looks ridiculous . . . The animation could be smoother, and the 'iffy' collision detection registers some hits that aren't even close. The SNES controller has the ideal four-button layout for the game, but special moves are still hard to execute. The act of eating a native spectator (to regain life) is so complicated that it's not worth the effort. The post-apocalyptic backgrounds look good but aren't quite as awe-inspiring as the arcade. The music is sparse, but there are some memorable audio effects." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
I was once offered a contract position working on *Primal Rage*. Having previously taken a similar job in the industry only to cross the country to find the doors locked and chained on what was supposed to be my first day at my dream job, I hesitantly turned the temporary position down. At the time I felt I needed a secure full-time job after being burned. I have always regretted that decision, especially after *Primal Rage* became such a hit and the merchandising exploded. Not only did I buy the Super Nintendo version (among other console offerings), but also other licensed goods, such as the Playmates action figures, the comic book series, the *Primal Rage* novel, and even the dinosaur-themed birthday party favors. I suppose one never truly outgrows dinosaurs! – Michael Thomasson

Insider Insight:
In the mid-'90s, I loved going to the mall arcade to play *Primal Rage*. I had no knowledge that a console version existed until one day my neighbor across the street invited me to come over to play his brother's Super Nintendo. We went through his library of games pretty quickly, and I saw the label for *Primal Rage* sitting there staring at me. My friend popped in the game and we started to play. I watched the frustration build in his eyes as I beat him round after round. It was about the eighth or ninth game we were playing when finally, in a fit of rage, he threw the controller at the TV and preceded to yell obscenities at the game.

It was not until I mentioned that I had seen someone at the arcade do what looked like a fatality on *Primal Rage* that he started to get smart with me. As we played, he continued to tell me I was lying about the finishing moves that each character could perform—until the end of our last game. In some strange turn of events, I electrocuted my friend with Armadon. I have no idea how I did it in my mad mashing of buttons, but I guess it was just meant to be. This sent my friend over the edge as he yelled out what I learned later to be the "F" word. His brother heard the commotion and came into the room, asking what was going on, and I watched as my friend proceeded to lie to his brother about what he said. His brother sat down with me as we started a new game, and without my friend's knowledge whispered to me, asking, "What did he say?" I went along with my buddy's story, but knew I messed up when I asked what the "F" word meant. Needless to say, *Primal Rage* brought out the rage in my friend and also a week-long grounding. – Alex Thompson

Prince of Persia

Publisher: Konami. **Developer:** Arsys Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

A port of the Apple II computer classic (1989)—which was designed by Jordan Mechner and published by Broderbund—*Prince of Persia* has players battling baddies while trying to escape the castle dungeons of the evil Grand Vizier Jaffar. To kill a guard, skeleton, amazon, soldier, politician, knight, or other foe, players must let go of the d-pad so the prince will draw his sword. The prince can block an opponent's strike, and there are potions to drink (for extra time, healing, teleportation, perspective reversal, or the ability to float safely to the ground), but care should be taken, as some are poisonous. The castle is riddled with traps (including spikes, lava, pendulums, walls of flame, and multi-story drops) and puzzles (including pressure plates to open and close doors), and the game must be completed in two hours, making for a tough journey.

As in *Pitfall!* for the Atari 2600, the action does not truly scroll. Rather, when the prince goes past the edge of the playfield, the scene instantly changes to the next area. Another unusual aspect to the game is how the protagonist pulls himself up onto platforms. Further, the controls are purposely lagging, meaning there is a delayed reaction when the prince begins to walk, run, duck, climb, or jump. This can be problematic for those accustomed to more traditional platformers, but patient gamers will be rewarded with an involving quest. Comprised of twenty dangerous levels, *Prince of Persia* features some of the smoothest animation ever seen in a 16-bit title. Also released for the Genesis (with twelve levels and one hour to complete the game), Sega CD (with hundreds of film clips), NES, Game Boy Color, and other systems.

Notable Quotable:

"*Prince Of Persia* has been excellent in all its versions, but this is the best yet. All the levels have been redesigned (for the better), and a further eight brand new ones added, making 20 in all. Graphics are the most obvious improvement—they're completely new and, despite a few simplistic backdrops, prove very atmospheric. The one thing that hasn't changed is the slightly old-fashioned, flick-screen scrolling, but don't be put off by it—this is one game where it actually works well, in many ways heightening the tension, as you're never quite sure what lies on the next screen. Sound is of a similar quality, too, though the impressive Arabian scores rather put to shame the simplistic sound effects. Best of all, though, gameplay just oozes out of the game: it's a winning combination of puzzles, sword-fighting, and platform-style action which all produce a hugely enjoyable game." – *Super Play* (March 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The Super Nintendo port manages to capture the feel of the original, enhancing it with even more amazing graphics and animation than the original. It also adds more levels and new challenges, yet avoids changing the heart and soul of the original Apple release . . . The only additions to the game are made in a way that actually enhances it, making it a true rarity in that respect. Perhaps the most brilliant aspect is the ability to change out how the buttons are mapped . . . this was a welcome feature on the port, as it contains a button layout that just didn't feel natural to me. Given the importance of exact timing as you run and jump across each level, the significance of this feature can't be stressed enough . . . The only real downsides to the SNES version are small ones. The first is a sign of the times, as this port was made during Nintendo's 'Rated G' era, meaning the blood is missing. In the original Apple computer version, there would be a splatter of blood when you fell into a bed of spikes or got caught up in the snapping metal jaws. While this omission takes nothing away from the gameplay itself, it seems odd that you can be impaled or chopped in half without so much as a drop of the red stuff. The only other downside is the same that existed in the original version, which is that the game has little replay value once it has been mastered. The very puzzle elements that make the game into a different kind of platformer become a non-factor once you've memorized them all." – Patrick Scott Patterson (www.syfygames.com)

Insider Insight:

Even if you were not a PC gamer back in the day, it was hard to avoid hearing about Jordan Mechner's groundbreaking *Prince of Persia*. The rotoscoped animation was breathtaking. It is not surprising the game eventually made it to practically every home console on the market.

I am a Sega kid, and while I always thought the extremely bloody conversion for the Sega CD was kind of awesome, nothing holds a candle to Konami's Super Nintendo port. The Japanese powerhouse added a visual flair to the proceedings that the game desperately needed. The prince himself just looked much more interesting. And little touches like the subterranean river in the sprawling caverns beneath the castle foundation gave the whole thing so much personality.

I never actually finished *Prince of Persia*, though I am sure I have started it at least a dozen times. – Greg Sewart

Prince of Persia 2: The Shadow and the Flame

Publisher: Titus Software.
Developer: Titus Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

Similar to the first game, *Prince of Persia 2* has players running, climbing, crouching, jumping (on platforms, over holes, etc.), avoiding traps (spikes, lava, and the like), solving puzzles, drinking potions (for flight, extra time, etc.), riding magic carpets, and hitting switches to open gates. Areas to explore in this cinematic game include caves, castles, palaces, the beach, dungeons, and more. You will unsheathe your quickly slashing sword to battle guards, snakes, skeletons, birdmen, and flying heads.

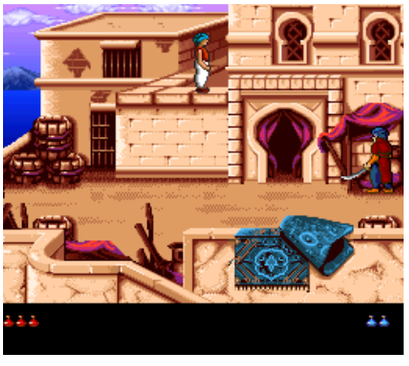
The combat has been amped up this time around, as multiple enemies frequently appear at once, sometimes flanking you, and sometimes immediately being replaced by reinforcements when defeated. A two-story drop will hurt you while a three-story drop will kill you, meaning it is often smart to climb down from ledges. Lives are unlimited, but there is a time limit. The action transitions abruptly from screen to screen as you go, but the playfields are large, meaning there is some scrolling. Followed by *Prince of Persia 3D* (Dreamcast), *Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time* (various), and other sequels.

Fun Fact: The original version of *Prince of Persia 2* won *Computer Gaming World*'s 1993 "Action Game of the Year" award.

Fun Fact: Microïds worked on a Sega Mega Drive version of the game to be published by Psygnosis, but it was never officially released.

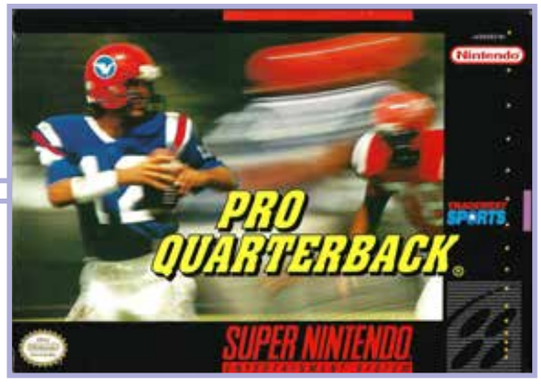
Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are livelier with well-lit, detailed dungeons and outdoor scenes. Unfortunately, the characters are outlined in retro-black and are fairly small. The music is still eerie, but this game could use more demonstrative sound effects. A tough thinking-gamer's game, *POP2* is a decent adventure." – *GamePro* (February 1997).

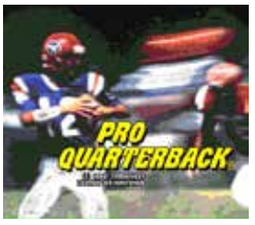
Notable Quotable:
"It's a very weird port. The game seems to run slightly faster than its computer counterparts, the time limit begins at the start of the game, and the music is just all kinds of messed up. Most of the coolest sound effects are entirely gone, too, but at least the gore remains intact this time. Unsurprisingly, there is no voiceover in the cutscenes, and some segments like the ride on the winged horse are told through still images rather than the animated scenes from the original. Almost all of the graphics have been redrawn, with mixed results. The cave sections look much nicer, but the later castle stages are changed from the awesome blood red to a duller brick color. The worst cut-back is the removal of the entire final level—on PCs one of the coolest parts of the game, where Jaffar whizzes the Prince to some messed up alternate dimension full of chess pieces, mirrors, and giant spider corpses." – Kurt Kalata and Sam Derboo (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Pro Quarterback

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: Leland Interactive Media.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.





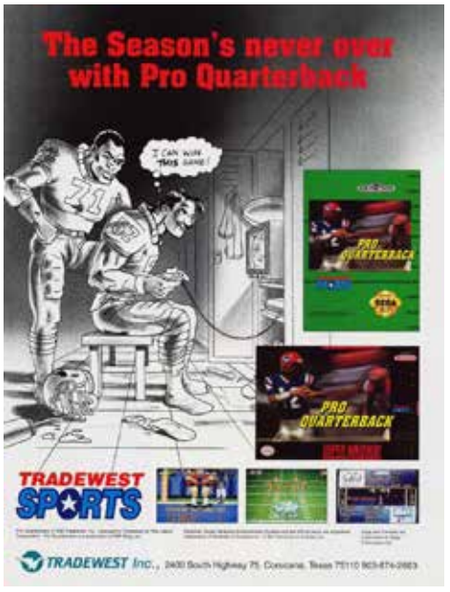
Viewed from behind the quarterback—giving players a nice look at down-field receivers—the arcade-style, high-scoring *Pro Quarterback* offers the following features: twenty-six selectable teams (all generic, since the game lacks NFL and NFLPA licensing); seven defensive and eight offensive plays; adjustable quarter lengths (2, 5, 10, or 15 minutes); instant replays; six different field surfaces (grass, dirt, snow, rain, mud, and artificial turf); and competitive and cooperative play, the latter of which has one player controlling the receiver and one controlling the quarterback. Mode 7 effects depict ball movement.

In this game players can dive, break tackles, and guide receivers toward a passed ball (though not jump for the ball—the computer takes care of that). Unfortunately, the game lacks penalties (other than delay of game when the time runs out) and season mode, and there are only nine players (as opposed to eleven) on the field for each team. Animation is choppy, but there are a few (make that very few) presentational flourishes, such as scoreboard animations and limited voice effects (such as "fumble" and "interception"). Teams are named by city, and their colors match their NFL counterparts. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"Although the two-player option is far more fun than the frustrating one-player game, when all's said and done, this is an interesting, though below par, American football game." – *N-Force* (February 1993)

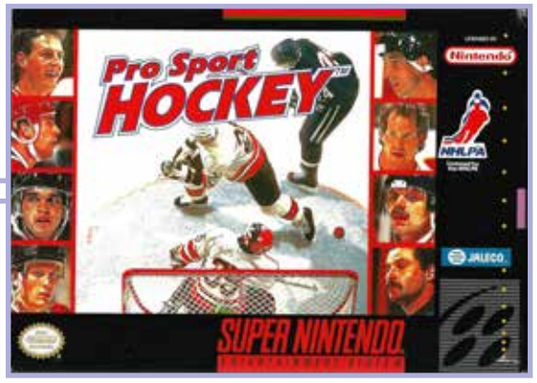
Notable Quotable:
"With a title as generic as that, what do you expect? The graphics are terrible, the framerate is limited, the playbook is extremely limited, there're no real teams or players, and no reason to play this game whatsoever." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"I truly enjoyed the presentation of this game—it's the actual football play that I found lacking. The game has some great graphics and an over-the-shoulder perspective that is crisp and bright. The players respond like real players to dish up some real tackles. The game's playbook and input just don't compare to its looks." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)



Pro Sport Hockey

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Jaleco.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



An updating of the NES game of the same name, *Pro Sport Hockey* for the SNES features 600 (as opposed to 288) real NHPLA players that are unrecognizable, but depicted fairly large on the screen. You select from twenty-four teams (named by city but not mascot, since there is no NHL license), each rated according to shot, power, quickness, defense, and goalie. You can play an exhibition game, an official game, or practice a shootout, or you can play an eighty-four-game season with playoffs and Cup finals. You can select period length and whether there are ties or overtime.

Options you can turn on or off include music, stereo, penalties, fatigue, offsides, icing, and home luck. You can create and change lines for scoring, checking, and power plays. Unlike the NES game, the SNES version has an energy system that wears down goalies to the point where they are too tired to block shots. Naturally, the graphics are better in the SNES game, including more detailed players and light blue tinting on the ice (as opposed to plain white ice). You can compete against the computer or a human opponent, or you can watch the computer play itself. The top-down action scrolls vertically (and a little horizontally to show the entire width of the rink), with the camera following the puck carrier as he races toward the net.

Notable Quotable:

"This sim is unfortunately checked by weak gameplay. You've got large characters, but they're sooo slow—and there's limited shot selection, too." – *Game Players* (December 1993).

Notable Quotable:

"This was an NES remake . . . It must have been improved for the SNES port, right? Well, they did touch a couple things up (or at least touched them). The players took on the resemblance of monkeys, rather than stick figures . . . Audio effects still sound as though they're coming from one of the earliest consoles, aside from slightly satisfying organ music which will probably end up being shut off in options, just because the menu music's that grating . . . An energy system has been implemented in this version, which is probably the best thing the game has going for it. The concept was to wear down the opposition, causing the goalie's little positional indicator to turn from blue to flush red. Once sufficiently tired, he'll apparently be incapable of stopping your shots. It's unfortunate, because it makes for scoreless games when you turn off the fatigue feature. Passing is also difficult, as computer players quickly scramble inward, collecting the puck. The same doesn't go for your offensive line, which never makes a feasible attempt to intercept the other team's passes. Energy is also expended with increased physicality, giving players another drawback for fisticuffs and general roughing beyond the penalty box. Yet there's no way to steal the puck without unintentionally putting the player in danger for a penalty or loss of energy. It's also too easy to run into teammates when checking, which can be amusing, but also drains the player." – Calvin Kemph (www.thunderboltgames.com)

P.T.O.: Pacific Theater of Operations

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A distinct thematic change from the line of medieval strategy games published by Koei, *P.T.O.* is set during the Pacific campaign of World War II. Commanding either Allied or Japanese forces, players reenact (and frequently alter the outcome of) nine different air and sea scenarios: Negotiations Breakdown, Attack on Pearl Harbor, Battle of the Coral Sea, Battle at Midway, Battle of the Solomon Islands, Battles in the South Pacific, Assault on the Marianas, Battle for the Philippines, and Okinawa Offensive.

Gameplay, which is facilitated by selecting commands and sub-commands from a menu, consists of gathering intelligence, recruiting soldiers, seizing materials, marking positions for movement, distributing budget funds to different areas (fuel, artillery, engine, electronics, and the like), assigning fleet commanders, setting officer abilities, ordering new warships, producing armaments and transport ships, gathering information on enemy targets, engaging in diplomacy, requesting technology assistance, extinguishing fires, locating enemy submarines with sonar, launching air strikes, and much more. Your goals for victory vary in each mission, but they mostly involve occupying bases and sinking a certain number of battleships, cruisers, and aircraft carriers.

Although it does not offer anything spectacular in the way of graphics or sounds (the music is downright silly for a war game), this is a satisfyingly realistic simulation with a sophisticated, historically accurate mapping system for plotting your course. Based on the 1989 computer game, *P.T.O.* includes ten difficulty levels, sixteen different fleets to command, and 250 different WWII ships. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics and controls in this game aren't all that great, unfortunately, but for fans of Koei's strategy games, this is yet another good war simulation." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1994, Adventure Press)

Notable Quotable:

"A grand, sweeping portrayal of the WWII Pacific conflict . . . Playing the entire campaign requires a tremendous commitment on the player's part as it can last 200–300 hours . . . The combat sequences are probably the least aesthetically pleasing in the whole product, and the player has the option of toggling them off if desired and viewing only the results . . . a major accomplishment . . . a polished, intellectually challenging alternative to standard video game fare." – *Electronic Games* (June 1993)

P.T.O.: Pacific Theater of Operations II

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

The battle rages on in this sequel to the complicated Koei semi-classic. Set during the conflict between the US and Japan during World War II, the game lets you play one of three major campaigns (the beginning, middle, and end of war): The Brink of War, Counter Offensive, and Approaching V-Day. You can also play seven short scenarios: The Day of Infamy, Southern Operations, Battle of Midway, US Australia Plan, Operation A-GO, Battle of Leyte, and The Final Days. During most of the scenarios you can fight for either side.

You can command forces from seventy strategic locations around the world, set your own victory conditions, use advanced technology to intercept and decipher enemy messages, attend planning conferences, storm the beaches of Okinawa, launch fighter attacks, command fleets of ships, search for enemy fleets, shell enemy targets, and much more. You'll select from 120 warships, 60 fighters and bombers, 20 submarines, and 10 different types of tanks.

Apart from the top-down, computer-generated battle scenes, the majority of the action takes place within charts, selection menus, text screens, and the like. Based on the 1993 computer game. The Saturn version has CD-quality sound and features black-and-white video clips. Followed by *Pacific Theater of Operations IV* (PS2). The third game in the series, *Teitoku no Ketsudan III*, was only released in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"The Super Nintendo version of *P.T.O. II* has so much more than the PC version . . . You can actually play the battles, for instance, instead of just seeing it abstractly. The music is wonderful, the controls are easier, and the game is more difficult with an even better A.I." – www.old-games.com

Notable Quotable:

"*P.T.O. II* is an interesting war simulation that's definitely for mature gamers with a yen for history, a mind for numbers, and plenty of time to kill . . . The sights and sounds of war are missing in action. Limited animations and tiny icons invade the graphics. The sounds attack your patience with repetitive orchestral music." – *GamePro* (March 1996)

Notable Quotable:

"Koei is synonymous with quality, historical sims . . . *P.T.O. II* is chock-full of stats, historical records, and things to do, but that's just it: there's too much. You get so bogged down in every minute detail that the big picture and the enjoyment get lost in the soup. If you are heavy into sims, this will be paradise; otherwise, stick with Koei's other stuff: too much is going on here." – *Ultimate Gamer Magazine* (January 1996).

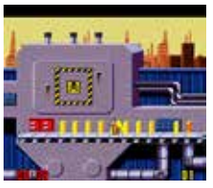
Insider Insight:
In sixth grade, I was (legitimately) sick from school for about two weeks. My best friend—also named David—lived down the street from me and would come visit after school. One day he brought over *P.T.O.: Pacific Theater of Operations II*. I had never heard of it, nor its predecessor. But I'll be damned if that wasn't the most fun game ever! You got to play as the Japanese—the bad guys! But we would actually play as both sides and take turns.

I remember the game being pretty difficult to get the hang of at first: you basically have to know naval warfare strategy, and what eleven-year-old kid doesn't, right? And one thing we would always do was *not* follow the events of history and see what happened. For instance, as the Japanese you could decide not to attack Pearl Harbor.

The other thing I remember, out of all the mechanics of the game, was "banquets." Your fleet would suffer a loss during a battle and lower the morale of the unit, which would affect outcomes of future battles, so you could throw a banquet to boost morale. This was hilarious to me. A banquet solves everything! David actually did end up going off to war in 2003, and sadly, lost his life in Iraq in 2004. When I started collecting SNES titles *P.T.O. II* was one of my first purchases, and it is still my most prized game because of those memories. – David Paul

Push-Over

Publisher: Ocean Software.
Developer: Red Rat Software.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1 player.
Year: 1992.



In *Push-Over*, you control G. I. Ant, a soldier who must venture through nine different continents in Captain Rats Treasure Caves, picking up dominoes and arranging them on platforms, positioning them in such a way that they can all be knocked over with one push. There are ten different types of dominoes, each a different color/design, and each distinguishable by its behavior when it falls, gets pushed, or is hit during a chain reaction.

Normals behave like standard dominoes. Ascenders rise upward. Bridgers fill gaps in the floor. Delays wait briefly before toppling, and a domino that hits it will fall back the other way. Exploders destroy the floors beneath them. Splitters split to the left and right, hitting adjacent dominoes. Stoppers do not fall. Tumblers keep tumbling until they hit a fallen domino or tumble off the screen. Vanishers disappear immediately after being hit. Triggers must be the final domino to fall.

After you finish and exit a level, you will receive a token that you can use to complete a level, even if you exceed the time limit, or to take back a "push" (since you only get one push per level). You fail in your mission if the trigger domino is not the last one to fall, if you do not knock down all the dominoes, or if you fall from too great a height. More than 100 timed, non-scrolling, cleverly designed puzzles give gamers hours and hours of strategic, brain-straining fun.

Fun Fact: The computer version of the game was sponsored by Smiths' British snack Quavers and includes the Quavers' mascot at the time, "Colin Curly," who loses his Quavers packets down a giant ant hill.

Notable Quotable:
"The theme of *Push-Over* is ingenious—players have to line up 10 kinds of dominoes, then get them all to fall with a single push—but the static execution will have small kids dozing off way before their bedtime." – *Entertainment Weekly* (April 2, 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"It is a mystery as to why this game never received its proper due, but it's not exactly obscure, so you can probably hunt it down with a small amount of effort. The box makes the game out to be some kind of cutesy, lighthearted platform game, but the puzzles are anything but light, especially after the first few rounds of play. If you like fun puzzle games with plenty of challenge and originality, give *Push-Over* a try." – All Game Guide (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:
People often ask how I have come across so many unique and special games that are in my collection. Most people do not realize that a lot of us have been collecting games since day one. I was always hitting up flea markets and yard sales, even as a young kid. During those adventures is when I came across a little-known game called *Push-Over*. The 16-bit action puzzle genre, including such games as *Lemmings*, is something that I loved growing up, when I had all the time in the world, but I no longer enjoy them as much.

Push-Over falls into this category, as you are essentially setting up dominoes—with some having unique abilities that are denoted by symbols—with the goal to knock them all down and open the exit. The key here is that you have a time limit that always gives you a sense of urgency. There definitely is a "one more time" mentality behind this game, and you can continue from the level where you left off indefinitely. Beyond the initial rush of figuring out this game and watching the dominoes topple over, *Push-Over* does not offer much else in terms of replayability. It is unfortunate, as I picked this game up for only a couple bucks back in the day and played it a ton, but it just does not give me those nostalgic feelings like certain other 16-bit gems. – Jeffrey Wittenhagen

Q*bert 3

Publisher: NTVIC.
Developer: Realtime Associates.
Game Type: Non-Scrolling Platformer/Action Puzzle, 1–2 players.
Year: 1992.

In Gottlieb's original *Q*bert* arcade game (1982), the title character hopped around on cubes that were stacked in a pyramid, avoiding enemies while changing all the cubes to the same color. While *Q*bert 3* offers similar gameplay, it ups the ante and degree of challenge by introducing more than 100 differently shaped playfields with varying themes, including flags, briefcases, crates, gift boxes, ice, columns, and dice.

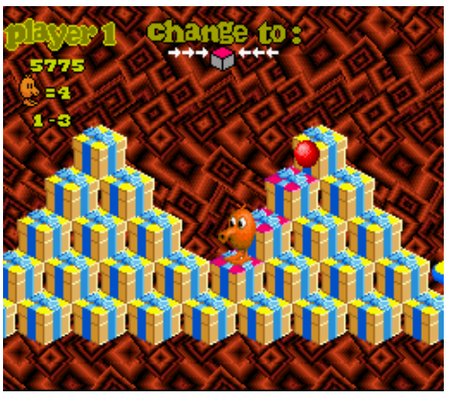
As in the original, you must make all of the surfaces of the stack of cubes match the target color. Unless you land on a flying disk, which will take you to the top of the stack, hopping off the board is lethal, as is bumping into creatures Ugg or Wrong-Way, who move across the board. Also like the original, Q*bert can catch Sam and Slick—who move from top to bottom and change the color of the cubes they land on—and he can catch freeze balls, which cause the other characters on screen to stop in their tracks. Coily ball, who changes to Coily the snake once he reaches the bottom, also returns in this sequel, as does a bad ball that bounces from the top to the bottom.

New enemies include Frogg, who chases Q*bert anywhere he goes on the board; Lefty and Righty, who traverse the board in left and right circles; Top Hat and Derby, who jump in fixed positions; and Beacon, who shoots red mini-balls. Grabbing fruit—including apples, cherries, and strawberries—awards extra points. The Super NES controller handles the action perfectly, and an array of dazzling backgrounds makes this one of the better-looking puzzle-type games for any system. Cute music and sound effects round out this entertaining, highly addictive sequel, which was the follow-up to *Q*bert's Qubes* for the arcade, Atari 2600, and ColecoVision, and *Q*bert* on the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

"If you liked *Q*bert* in the arcades, *Q*bert 3* is a must. For a puzzler, it doesn't top the IQ requirement scale, but you've gotta have pretty fast reflexes. Good sound and outstanding graphics make this cart jump. Hop on over to Q*bert's pad!" – *GamePro* (December 1992)

Memories: I spent most of my time playing the original *Q*bert* at the Putt-Putt Golf and Games in Hurst, Texas, a suburb of Fort Worth. Back in those days Putt Putt stayed open 24–7, and I remember sneaking out one school night my freshman year of high school after my parents had gone to bed and riding with my friend to Putt-Putt and playing games till around 5:00 in the morning. I made it home before my dad got up for work, slept a couple of hours, then went to school, sleeping through first period Spanish. In 1983, I picked up *Q*bert* for the ColecoVision (a great port,



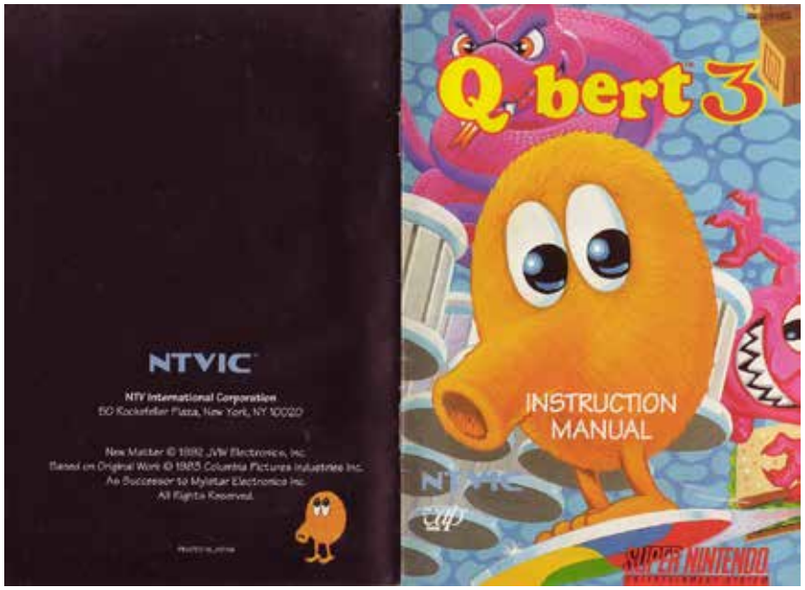
despite Q*bert's hollow eyes), but my favorite game starring the hose-nosed title character is *Q*bert 3*, followed closely by *Q*bert* for the PlayStation. Both are faithful to the spirit of Warren Davis's coin-op classic but add lots of color, new challenges, and different patterns. While writing this book I messaged Davis—whom I met at the Let's Play Gaming Expo near Dallas a couple years ago—through Facebook to see if he had any involvement with *Q*bert 3*, and he told me none whatsoever—he hadn't even played it before.

Insider Insight: *Q*bert 3* was one of our first SNES titles at Realtime Associates. We had done *Q*Bert* for Game Boy, so that is how the SNES version was designated *Q*bert 3*. At the time we were still working out of our homes; we had one programmer for gameplay and one for special effects, and a few contributing artists (including Brummbaer, an early pioneer of 3D graphics production and techniques), with a delightful music soundtrack by Joe McDermott of Team Fat. (In fact, once Realtime Associates moved into office space, the hold music on our phone system was connected to an actual SNES playing a continuing *Q*bert 3* music loop.) I was fascinated by the high-end graphics possibilities of the SNES, but there wasn't any call for them in a classic *Q*Bert* game, so we ended up doing a ton of psychedelic animated backdrops that had nothing to do with gameplay. As cool as they were, ultimately the feedback I got was that they were distracting. – David Warhol

Insider Insight: It was 1992—my first year working at a video game store. As the 16-bit era started to peak, new games were being released at a fierce pace, at times difficult to keep up with. Being a lifelong gamer, I had a soft spot for the classics, which made me cynical of remakes using classic gaming properties. This includes one featuring a swearing orange character with a large snout.

*Q*bert* was one of those games I always enjoyed playing. I had the toys and watched the cartoon, but aside from some console ports, the Q*Bert series seemed all but finished. That is until one chilly October afternoon I unpacked a shipment and put NTVIC's *Q*bert 3* on the peg. I had little faith it was going to be very good. It was released by a relatively unknown game publisher and was expensive for a title based on a ten-year-old arcade game. That did not stop me from dumping a portion of my paycheck on it to see what it was all about.

From the moment I put the game on and heard the catchy intro jingle (which I later came up with lyrics to), I felt like this was going to be something special. All the classic elements like the isometric color-changing cubes, Coily the snake, and the bouncing balls returned. New foes named Frogg, Top Hat, and Derby were introduced. Yes, Q*bert was back with modern level designs, and even a few strands of head hair thanks to those fancy 16-bit pixels. The fun memories of watching Q*bert hop around the colorful, trance-inducing psychedelic landscapes is why I will always refer to *Q*bert 3* as a classic. – Stephanie Mckeon



Race Drivin'

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Imagineering Inc.
Game Type: Sports Car Racing, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Based on Atari's 1990 arcade game—available in a sit-down cockpit model with a force-feedback steering wheel and a contoured, moveable seat—*Race Drivin'* lets players select one of three different cars: Roadster, Sportster (manual or automatic), and Speedster, each varying in terms of speed and handling. Races take place on three different tracks: Autocross, Stunt, and Super Stunt. Objectives include staying on the narrow tracks, driving fast enough to reach check points, and performing such stunts as jump loop and corkscrew loop.

The first-person view is from inside the car (the view of the track is only about ⅓ of the screen), and yellow road signs clue players in on what speed they should be driving to perform the upcoming stunt. Unfortunately, a low framerate, poor controls, and less-than-convincing speed of motion ruin the experience, making for a pathetic port. In fact, the game is even slower and clunkier than the lame Genesis version, which at least has a Custom mode that lets players design their own twisting, turning, looping courses. The sequel to *Hard Drivin'* (arcade, Genesis, Lynx), *Race Drivin'* was also released for the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

"Ouch! *Race Drivin'* just doesn't have the punch it should. I need a steering wheel and a strobe light to keep up with the frame-by-frame animation here! The scaling is almost non-existent, and without a steering wheel, so is the control." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"This version is an insult to the arcade game. The graphics are really bad. They're okay if you don't mind driving a colored box that handles like a rock. Gameplay is non-existent. The sound effects consist of the car starting and the annoying whirr of the engine. The WORST driving game I have ever seen!" – *Game Zero* (December 1992)

Insider Insight:
I had very few games as a kid. Most of what I did have came from the clearance bin at my local Blockbuster (R.I.P. Crosby Ave. location in the Bronx, New York, if you were wondering). *Race Drivin'* was different. It was from Toys "R" Us. At the time, for video games at TRU, usually you grabbed a slip of paper with the name of the game and the price from the wall, paid, and brought it to the "cage," and the guy with the keys would get your game for you. If you were lucky you got a glimpse into the cage and could see all the games and systems on shelves.

Not *Race Drivin'*. No slip of paper, no trip to the cage, no glimpse of anything. It was just there, in a bin with a bunch of other titles I had never heard of. These were the days before I could bring up a YouTube video of gameplay, and my family was too broke for *Nintendo Power*, so I picked my games based 100% on the box art, and whoa boy did *Race Drivin'* pull me in with its dramatic image of a yellow sports car (complete with flame decals) moving so fast that it was falling apart and dragging some unassuming schlub in a red tie behind it. I remember flipping it over and seeing the 3D gameplay and *needing* that game. I had no racing games, I begged. My mom relented and said if it was cheap, I could get it. Great success.

Once home, I started up my new game immediately. *BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRT*. That's the sound. If you've ever played it, you understand exactly. I crashed immediately. Was I playing wrong? I tried again. *BRRRRRRRT*. Crash. *BRRRRRRRRRT*. Crash. I played for fifteen minutes, set my controller down, turned off my SNES, popped the game out, and placed it in the trash.

Despite my disgust with *Race Drivin'*, I would not learn what true disappointment was until a few years later, when I bought *Primal Rage* with my birthday money. Now *that* was disappointing—how could a concept as flawless as dinosaurs fighting to the death not be great? Unfortunately, it was about as fun as being poked in the eye. –Antoinette Carey

Radical Rex

Publisher: Activision.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1994.

A cute, playable platformer, *Radical Rex* has players guiding a tyrannosaurus through five colorful levels: Jungle Jam, Swamp City, Inner Works, Dino Graveyard, and Skriitch's Forest, plus a bonus world accessible by gathering eighty dinosaur eggs. After beating the fifth level, players will discover that all five must be repeated, which is why the back of the box boasts that the game has ten levels. The title character is a smiling, cartoon-like, mascot-wannabe dinosaur who can walk, jump, swim ("sucking fish" provides extra oxygen), climb, kick (including jump kicks), ride moving platforms, swing on vines, and ride a skateboard, which gives Rex Sonic-like speed (without the board he moves relatively slowly).

In addition to roaring, breathing fire, and blowing bubbles, Rex can employ a skateboard attack for battling fireball-spewing triceratops, tongue-whipping bullfrogs, poison-shooting scorpions, and other creatures. Fallen enemies can sometimes be used as stepping stones to reach higher areas, but Rex should avoid such obstacles as lava and falling bones. The SNES version of the game alters the formula of its Genesis and Sega CD counterparts in that it has different level designs, smaller sprites, a few new enemies, and more of an emphasis on skateboarding. The Genesis cart lacks the introductory musical rap, which is dated but endearing (if you like the genre). Of the three, the Sega CD disc has the best sound, followed by the SNES game.

Notable Quotable:

"Not quite radical enough for me. *Radical Rex* has a number of good points like very cute graphics and animations, but the control could use some work. This game will probably appeal more to younger gamers with its cutesy theme, otherwise it's more your run-and-smack-enemies-away type action game." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The above-average graphics have a Saturday morning cartoon look. Colorful jungle backgrounds contain all manner of crawling, running, swimming, and flying beasties to create a very cartoony world. Rex himself displays funny expressions throughout, especially when something bad happens. The sounds are also middle-of-the-tar-pit. Rex occasionally exclaims 'Radical,' but the dino lacks good roars and the tropical rhythms get repetitive. The opening rap number will keep your toes tapping. *Radical Rex* is about as good and as endearing as the successful *Joe & Mac* games. For simple thrills without the chills, get radical with Rex." – *GamePro* (November 1994)

Raiden Trad

Publisher: Electro Brain.
Developer: Toei Animation/Micronics.
Game Type: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

This port of the classic arcade shooter, *Raiden* (Saibu Kaihatsu, 1990), has players piloting a fighter bomber over the desert and the Suez Canal and through the black void of space, firing spread shot bullets, massive lasers, and missiles (homing and straight) at a seemingly endless barrage of airborne and ground-based enemies, including tanks, train cars, gun emplacements, flying vehicles that look like bladeless helicopters, and other mechanical constructs. Collecting icons powers up the weapons while grabbing medals increases your point total. You can also drop smart bombs. Each level ends with a large boss (or bosses). The action takes place in 2090, and your mission is to defend Earth from invasion by the unfortunately named Carnass aliens.

The Genesis version of *Raiden Trad* has different level designs than the SNES game. In addition, it lacks a two-player mode, and it forces players to go back to a checkpoint after dying. Released as *Raiden Densetsu* in Japan. *Raiden*—without the word "Trad" tacked on—was also ported to the Lynx, Jaguar, and TurboGrafx-16. Followed by a number of sequels, including *Raiden II* (arcade, PlayStation), *Raiden III* (arcade, PlayStation 2), *Raiden IV* (arcade, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360), and *Raiden V* (Xbox One, PlayStation 4).

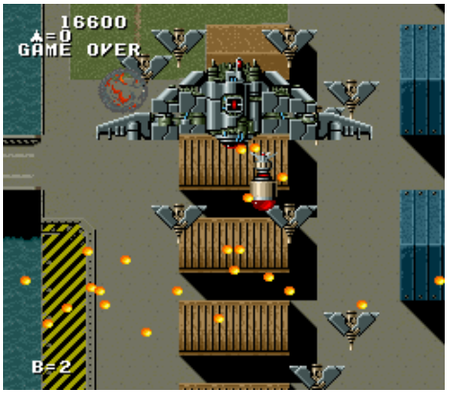
Memories: My favorite way to play *Raiden* is via *The Raiden Project* for the PlayStation, which came packaged in a long box and today is highly collectible. It is an excellent port of the original game and includes *Raiden II*. I also have fun with *Raiden Fighters Aces* (Xbox 360), which contains arcade ports of *Raiden Fighters*, *Raiden Fighters 2: Operation Hell Dive*, and *Raiden Fighters Jet*. In the *Raiden* series in general, which helped pioneer the "bullet hell" subgenre, I like how you can lock onto enemies with long laser beams while at the same time firing missiles. Regarding *Raiden Trad*, it is pretty rad, but I have no idea why the word "Trad" was added to the title.

Notable Quotable:

"Because of technical limitations, *Raiden Trad* has a horizontal monitor, unlike its vertically monitored arcade version. Music has been redone for the worse, making it sound like some poor MIDI. Graphics are obviously worse and look very washed-out. Worst of all, sprites will flicker occasionally and the bomb sprite will inexplicably appear behind a boss after its defeat due to some sort of glitch. Plus, *Raiden*'s originally rock-hard difficulty was dumbed down for the SNES release, making it somewhat easy even on Pro difficulty. The one thing that *Trad* improves over the arcade version, however, is that there is absolutely no slowdown, even in two-player mode. Enemies and bullets will appear everywhere, but there will be no slowdown." – A Kid's Review (amazon.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Most of the ports go under the name *Raiden Densetsu* (*Raiden Legend*), with the Genesis/Mega Drive and SNES versions being called *Raiden Trad* . . . Another release was on the Japanese FM Towns Marty console [which is] basically the closest you could get to the



arcade, albeit with a kickass enhanced soundtrack. Unfortunately, it's also like the TurboGrafx-16 version in that it boots you back to a checkpoint after losing a life. The Genesis version, despite some hits in the graphical and musical department, actually plays well. A large portion of the screen is taken up by a status bar to account for the larger resolution of the Genesis. It is similar to the FM Towns version, including the penalty of going back after each destroyed life. The SNES version of *Raiden* was lamentably handled by infamous shadow developer Micronics, whose legacy of suckiness can be found in boggled ports like the NES *1942* and *Athena*. It has some janky animation and the sound quality isn't all that great, and the feel of the game is like the off-kilter TurboGrafx-16 version. It at least offers leniency by allowing you to continue on the spot no matter what, but the overall aggravation of enemies on any difficulty higher than easy means you'll be needing all of them." – Hardcore Gaming 101 (hg101.kontek.net/raiden/raiden.htm)

Insider Insight: I always enjoyed a good shmup, but *Raiden* has a special place in my heart. Before the responsibilities of life caught up to me, when I was playing games at my peak, *Raiden* was a staple title that I routinely returned to play again and again. It wasn't the best shooter, but it was solid enough to have some type of power over me. Like the girl next door that you could always count on in a pinch, it was there for me.

I have fond memories of playing the game with many friends, especially since it was one of the few multi-player games on the Super Nintendo. Whenever a guest was visiting, *Raiden Trad* eventually found its way into the SNES cartridge slot. Like a good friend, years later, when everyone else seemed to move on to flashier and faster shooters, I bought yet another copy of *Raiden*—this time for the Atari Jaguar . . . as very few others would! – Michael Thomasson

Rampart

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Bitmasters.
Game Type: Strategy/Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Viewed from overhead and set during the Middle Ages, *Rampart* is a complex, unusual, highly entertaining game. After selecting a territory and choosing a castle to defend, players engage in three primary activities: strategically placing their cannons (the closer a cannon is to the harbor containing enemy ships, the better); guiding a gunsight over enemy gunships, troopers, and flagships while firing cannons (the more cannons the player has, the faster he or she can shoot); and using rotatable wall segments (some of which look like *Tetris* puzzle pieces) to fill in holes in castle walls and to build new castle walls. To continue to the next battle, players must surround at least one castle with walls, and you can force your defeated enemies to walk the plank.

Based on Atari's 1990 arcade game, which benefited from trackball control, a three-player mode, and higher resolution graphics, *Rampart* was also released for the Game Boy, Game Boy Color, Atari Lynx, NES, and Genesis. In addition to the standard arcade port, the SNES version includes an exclusive game called *Super Rampart*, which adds bosses, bonus rounds, more powerful artillery, and more than fifteen new scrolling battlefields.

Notable Quotable:

"*Rampart*'s a blast! It features exciting, strategic, long-range gunning with challenging, *Tetris*-like shape handling. If you have a thing for castle-building under pressure, take on *Rampart*. It'll really bust your walls." – *GamePro* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Even with basic/advanced game settings and three skill levels, *Rampart* just doesn't deliver the goods. A good shot at a difficult game formula but only for die-hard strategy fans. Not enough action to be a smash!" – *N-Force* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Franz Lansinger, the programming mastermind behind the classic *Crystal Castles* coin-op, has done an outstanding job of capturing the magic of *Rampart* for Super NES users while, at the same time, expanding the scope of the original title. This game is a bit repetitive, but the quality of play stands up to the manner in which it's been designed. The action is definitely cerebral, but in the end it remains fun nevertheless." – *Electronic Games* (December 1992)

Insider Insight:
While attending undergraduate school, I was first introduced to *Rampart* by my friends Leann and Larry. I originally met the couple after answering a classified ad in the school newspaper selling a copy of *Hard Drivin'*. Following the exchange we all became friends, and many weekends were spent in their apartment playing the latest games.

I vividly remember them teaching me the rules of *Rampart*—a rather distinctive game—and being mesmerized by the three unique rounds of gameplay. I am normally not a very competitive player, but *Rampart* had my number and I needed just "one more match" after every epic battle with my friends! The game was crazy addictive, and for weeks I dreamt of placing armaments, firing cannons, and repairing ramparts. – Michael Thomasson

Ranma 1/2: Hard Battle

Publisher: DTMC.
Developer: NCS Corporation.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A solid one-on-one fighter influenced by such titles as *Street Fighter II* and *Fatal Fury: King of Fighters*, this game features the following characters from *Ranma 1/2* anime and manga: Ranma Saotome (the protagonist of the series), Ryoga Hibiki (Ranma's self-proclaimed rival), Shampoo, Akane Tendo, Genma Saotome (Ranma's father, who fights as a giant panda), Hikaru Gosunkugi, Gambling King (one of the slower, weaker characters), Ukkyo Kuonji, Mousse, and Pantyhose Taro. Each character can punch, kick, jump, and throw enemies, along with pull off a few special moves (which are easy to execute), such as Saotome's flying dragon blast, roaring tiger, and sweet chestnut fist, and Shampoo's heel drop, dragon sky kick, and fury charge. Certain characters have weapons, such as Kuonji's giant spatula swing and Mousse's broadsword and iron ball and chain.

The graphics are colorful and nicely detailed, and the music has a rich Japanese sound, but it is obviously not taken from the anime, nor are the voice effects. Modes of play include 1P Tournament Mode, 2P Competition Mode, and Team Challenge Mode (For Two Players), in which each player chooses a team of five characters. Options include three difficulty levels, time (off or 30, 60, or 100 seconds), and two types of controller settings. See also: *Street Combat*.

Notable Quotable:

"The backgrounds are refreshingly simple and keep the fighters clearly visible, unlike many fighting games in which the overly-complex backgrounds clash with the sprites. The animation of both the defeated and victorious characters is charmingly presented . . . The soundtrack is pleasant, but not spectacular, and the heavily Americanized speech is a cloying turnoff. A solid fighting game that is considerably enlivened by the goofy charm of its characters and situations." – *Electronic Games* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are painfully basic. You've got light and hard attacks and a button to jump and the d-pad to move. Despite the stripped-down implementation, there are some shiny special attacks to pull off. Damn near every character has some variation on the hundred-hand slap, for better or for worse. The throws seem inordinately powerful. Those with a head for timing or pure button-mashing luck can land on their feet and minimize damage . . . It may not be the best 2D fighter. Heck, it's barely passable, but it does stick out as one of the earliest examples of an anime-related game keeping true to its roots." – CGR Undertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The only reason I linked the game to the anime was because of the ads Viz Video had for it on their VHS tapes. I remember seeing the box sitting on the shelf at Electronics Boutique AGES before I saw the ad, and thinking, 'Man, that art's pathetic, can't be a very good game if they'd let art like that be on the box.' Of course, once I realized that was supposed to be Ranma and Ryoga on the box, I went ahead and bought the game . . . The controls aren't very responsive; special attacks seemed to lag about three seconds after the correct buttons are mashed, and the character designs are kind of weak . . . There is some fun to be had with the game; it was nice having Akane finally get some licks in for a change, and even poor ol' Mousse got his chance to spank Shampoo." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Insider Insight:
I bought *Ranma 1/2: Hard Battle* at a Kay Bee Toys when it was on sale. I had never heard of it at the time, but in the late '90s, I was all about fighting games. During this era anime was not as accessible as it is now, and the story of *Ranma 1/2* seemed so weird to me. Hot springs that transform people into animals or other people that have died in them? A high school where the principal was super weird and had the students fight to pass their classes? I was used to *Mortal Kombat* and *Street Fighter II*. *Ranma 1/2* provided me with a unique alternative to what a fighting game on the SNES could be. As a plus, my little sister also enjoyed it, playing it alongside me. – Eric Perez

RapJam: Volume One

Publisher: Motown Games.
Developer: 64WD Creation.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Plagued by terrible controls, horrid graphics, and limited basketball action (i.e., players can't even switch between defenders), *RapJam: Volume One* is one of the worst games in the Super NES library. Real rap stars are featured as players, including Coolio, Flavor Flav, Warren G, Queen Latifah, LL Cool J, and House of Pain, but they are recognizable only in the selection screens, and they move around the court as though it were recently given a thick coat of wax.

Players can shove one another without worrying about fouls being called, and the action takes place on urban courts in five major cities: New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, and Atlanta. Onlookers—including a convertible car loaded with passengers—cheer for the players. There are some simple voice effects ("solid," "yeah,") but no music during gameplay. The ball bouncing and hitting the goal sounds realistic enough, and you can play one-on-one, two-on-two, or three-on-three. Championship and Challenge modes are available, and you can pull off a variety of slam dunks, such as corkscrew, helicopter, and somersault, but hoops fans should stick with the game this one tries to mimic: *NBA Jam*.

Thankfully, despite the game's title, a second volume of *RapJam* was never released. Motown Games, which was an offshoot of the legendary Motown record label, only produced one other game: *Bebe's Kids*.

Notable Quotable:

"What words describe *RapJam* best? Let's pull out the dictionary, shall we? It's abhorrent, bad, crappy, dreadful, execrable, frightful, ghastly, etc. There are no get-rich schemes in video games, kids. Thankfully, Motown Games learned its lesson and was never heard from again." – *Game Informer* (May 2003)

Notable Quotable:

"*Rap Jam*'s gameplay isn't bad because it's modeled after the fast-paced *NBA Jam*. There are plenty of rim-rattling dunks and a handy shot meter that makes it fun to sink jumpers. Up to five players can compete, and there's a nice selection of outdoor courts. It's the controls that hold this game back. There's simply no way to rebound the ball, so you'll have to wait for the ball to come down after a missed shot. Lame! The passing controls are confusing, and the 'Xtra' button is a poor substitute for turbo. There are no three-pointers in the game, despite having a three-point line. And since when is double dribbling legal?" – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Realm

Publisher: Titus.
Developer: Flair Software.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

In *Realm*, you control super cyborg Biomech, Earth's secret weapon in the battle against alien invaders who have devastated Earth, destroying its cities and killing most humans. The thin, blond, big-headed, rocker-looking hero will run, jump, climb, and blast his way through "the dark forest home of the resistance, through the stratosphere, to Plasma Port, and then onto the alien's Battle Station" using a variety of weapons (blaster, lasers, tri-gun, plasma boomerangs, heat-seeking missiles, and the like) to battle such enemies as bad guys, spaceships, robots, evil trees, skeletons, demons, lizards, and giant bosses.

As in *Contra*, you can shoot up, down, right, left, and diagonally. Shooting energy crystals releases orbs that provide weapon recharges and extra shields and lives. Other activities include floating on skull platforms, dodging boulders, riding elevators and moving platforms, and dodging projectiles. You will also ride futuristic vehicles (that move speedily to the right) while fending off aliens and fall from great heights while firing upward at enemy ships. The action takes place in the distant future of 5069.

Notable Quotable:
"*Realm* is a well-crafted throwback to *Gunstar Heroes*-style gameplay that will deliver a much-needed blast of excitement to bored SNES owners." – *GamePro* (December 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"My pulse starts to quicken when I hear 'run-and-gun.' In the days of *Contra*, *Mega Turrican*, or even *Super Castlevania*, such games were in their heyday, meaning that although the genre flourished, some platform shooters were in the race but lagging behind. Such is the case with *Realm* . . . [One level] reminds me way too much of the Wing Fortress Zone [from *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*]: the sloped wing structures, the egg-like turrets, and the fact that it's in the sky . . . *Realm* is the real deal when it comes to difficult 2D shooters . . . a decent and challenging game." – CGR Undertow (YouTube)

Redline: F-1 Racer

Publisher: Absolute Entertainment.
Developer: Genki.
Game Type: Formula-1/Indy Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

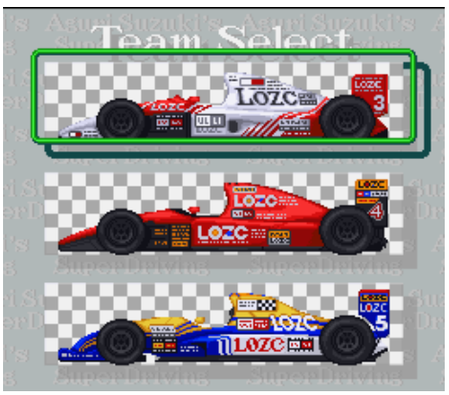
In *Redline: F-1 Racer*, you design your own formula-1 racecar, selecting such features as tires, brakes, chassis, and suspension systems. There are six different types of engines. You view the action low to the road from inside the cockpit of your car, with the bottom third of the screen displaying MPH, an overhead look at the track, and the like, and the top two-thirds showing gameplay. There are sixteen tracks to race on from around the world (plus two optional courses), including South African GP, Mexico GP, Brazilian GP, and Spanish GP.

You can bump your opponents off the road as you speed around the twisting, turning tracks, and you will go through tunnels. There are weather conditions to consider, including sunny skies, cloudy days, and rainy afternoons, the last of which call for better tires. Blinking arrows at the top of the screen help you anticipate turns. In addition to the one-player mode (3, 6, or 9 laps), you can challenge a friend to some two-player, split-screen action. Winning races lets you upgrade your car, and you can save your progress in the International Tournament. Released in Europe and Japan as *Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving*.

Fun Fact: The Game Boy version of *Aguri Suzuki F-1 Super Driving* was released only in Japan. In addition to a formula-1 car, it lets you drive a go-kart.

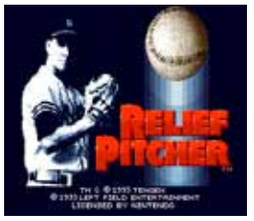
Notable Quotable:
"One-player mode gets tiresome, but in two-player, split-screen mode the action really hots up. If you've got the patience, learn to play *F1 Super Driving*; it's good fun." – *N-Force* (September 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"It's got amazingly fast graphics, it does nice things with tunnels and bridges, and it has a great split-screen, two-player mode. Its only significant failing is the way it shows you very little of the road ahead, making it very difficult to anticipate corners and drive around them without crashing. But once you have become familiar with the courses, or enlisted the help of a co-driver to keep an eye on the scanner and shout out warnings for you, this is less of a problem, and you will probably enjoy the game a lot." – *Super Play* (March 1993)



Relief Pitcher

Publisher: Left Field Entertainment.
Developer: Tengen.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Boasting some of the best voice effects ever heard in a 16-bit game, *Relief Pitcher* features uncanny commentary by MLB announcer Jack Buck—famous for his play-by-play of St. Louis Cardinals games. Unfortunately, there are only four teams in this game—each fictional—but with stadiums patterned after their real-life counterparts: Boston Bashers, Houston Dusters, Los Angeles Speeders, and Chicago Strokers. You can play a standard nine-inning game, or challenge a friend to either a regular game or a best-of-seven series, but what sets the game apart is the ability to play a series of twelve late-inning games, each of which will put you in a pressure situation, such as a close game, extra innings, or bases loaded with no outs.

Unfortunately, there is no season mode, you can't substitute pitchers or save stats, and fielding is extremely basic, as you can't change defensive positions, switch fielders, or jump or dive for the ball. Instead of controlling the fielders directly, you simply push a button to tell the player to run. (The back of the box boasts that this is a benefit, that the "straightforward controls take the confusion out of fielding.") The view of the action is from behind the batter, which is typical, but the batting and pitching have not-so-typical meters similar to what you might find in a golf title.

Prior to playing, you can select your closer's handedness (right or left), special pitch, and delivery style (overhand or sidearm). Other features include fastballs, curveballs, knuckleballs, changeups, power swings, suicide squeezes, steals, double plays, sacrifices, and the infield fly rule. Based on the 1992 Atari Games coin-op.

Notable Quotable:

"*Relief Pitcher* appears to be the cheap, generic baseball version of [a game] like *Pro Quarterback*. It has some impressive aspects, like Jack Buck doing the play-by-play, but this game is just not good. The animation is terrible—so bad to the point you have to start your swing while the ball is still in the pitcher's hand. Avoid this game." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"This game is pretty devoid of options with only two modes of play. It lets you play out a series of game scenarios (12 in total) from the ninth inning, hence '*Relief Pitcher*.' It also has a full game mode. There are no full season modes or any really mind-blowing options that you would not expect from a baseball game . . . As far as graphics and sounds are concerned, *Relief Pitcher* is excellent. The players and stadiums are well-animated, though some of the player images that pop up before each bat look a bit goofy . . . when there is a hit, it merely rotates the screen a bit, rather than moving the camera to where the ball is going . . . The game doesn't contain much in the way of music, aside from the menu screens . . . As far as gameplay goes, *Relief Pitcher* suffers . . . batting seems to be an exercise of randomness. You have the option of weak swing, strong swing, and bunt, but I did not seem to find any sort of strategy of when you can actually hit one out of the park. I found that there were far too many opposite-field hits, which seems kind of odd." – SNES Central (snescentral.com)

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Buckeroo$!

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Imagineering Inc.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Inspired by the *The Ren & Stimpy Show*—a Nickelodeon cartoon series that ran from 1991–1995—*Buckeroo$!* reveals that Stimpy has invented the Gametron 5000 Moneymaker, the first video game that rewards the player with money. Ren, who is always eager to get rich, gladly plays the game, setting the basis for three multi-part adventures based on episodes of the program: "Robin Hoëk of Logwood Forest," "Out West," and "Space Madness."

In "Robin Hoëk," the evil sheriff of Dodge City has ambushed Robin and taken him prisoner. You must help Robin escape Logwood Forest. You will dodge thrown apples, jump on moving platforms, climb ropes, avoid spikes, bounce on loose tree branches, and slap enemy knights and other enemies. You are also armed with a bow that can fire such projectiles as chickens, plungers, and watermelons, all of which you collect as you go. Eventually, you will embark on a mission to rescue Maid Moron.

In "Out West," Three-Fingered Hoëk and his faithful sidekick, Stimpy the Kid, must make their way out of the desert or they are cooked. Each character rides a running, jumping, flying chicken, and each wields a slingshot that can fire tomatoes at such enemies as armadillos, snakes, and cowboys. In addition, you will guide the buckaroos on foot on a mission to steal a horse. Hoëk slaps and Stimpy the Kid throws horseshoes at the buzzards, cow skulls, buffalo nickels, trough sharks, and other enemies.

"Space Madness" puts you in the role of Space Cadet Stimpy, trying to get a dazed, *Lemmings*-like Ren to the sick bay of a spaceship to feed him some chicken soup. You spit hairballs at Ren to get him to change directions and at rats, robots, and other enemies to defeat them. You will also get sucked into tubes to go up or down and set springs to get Ren to jump.

The NES version of *The Ren & Stimpy Show: Buckeroo$!* is also a platformer set in similar environments, but the games are much different. For example, there are side-scrolling shooter areas in the NES game.

Notable Quotable:
"The NES edition of the game looked fairly horrible, as the sprites were off-proportion and the visuals muddy and repetitive. The Super NES version actually had some nice animation with hand-rendered characters." – Side Questing (www.sidequesting.com)

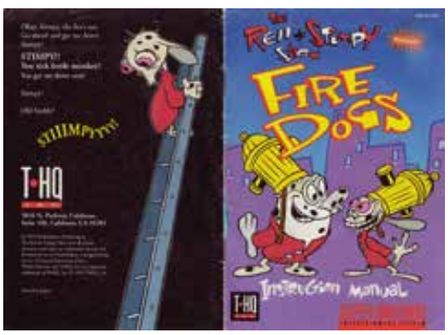
Notable Quotable:
"Good story and cinema scenes . . . more gameplay than previous *R&S* titles . . . The graphics don't look an awful lot like the show. The game, on the other hand, has some variety that will keep your interest—at least for a little while . . . It would be easy to condemn *Buckeroo$!* as just another vehicle of Ren and Stimpy silliness, but it has a few moments of near amusement." – *Nintendo Power* (May 1995)

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Fire Dogs

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Argonaut Games.
Game Type: Action/Climbing/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Based on the ninth first-season episode of *The Ren & Stimpy Show*, *Fire Dogs* puts you in the role of fat cat Stimpy, moving up and down poles and stairs and walking across the floors of a fire station, dodging a fireman and jumping over (or putting out) little fires as you go. You can avoid the fireman by painting yourself like a Dalmatian (avoid water so it does not wash away the paint). Your objective is to collect seven objects: a hose, uniform, helmet, beaver, trampoline, rope, and a pair of socks. Once you have collected all the items, you must place them on a fire truck on the ground floor before time expires.

The other main part of the game finds Ren and Stimpy dressed as firemen and holding a mini-trampoline, with you guiding them left and right to break the fall of objects (books, clocks, etc.) being thrown from a burning building. This part of the game, which lets you press a button to go faster, plays a little like *Circus Atari* or *Kaboom!* for the Atari 2600. There are also two bonus rounds: one where you search for Ren in the fire station and one where you bounce bags of Gritty Kitty Litter into a bin. A rental exclusive, *The Ren & Stimpy Show: Fire Dogs* is hard to find today, especially in nice condition.



Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are faithful to the cartoon, but there are essentially only two stages. So you'll see the same artwork used over again as you progress through the week . . . The game opens with a fantastic rendition of 'The Barber of Seville.' The rest of the music fits the game (and cartoon) perfectly, but there are no voices . . . Stimpy moves very slow (even while jogging) and is unresponsive to your controller. The game quickly gets tedious as you realize that you're doing the same thing over and over again . . . a horrible platform game that will make you feel like a 'stoopid leetle eeediot' as soon as you start playing . . . What makes this game so frustrating is the sloppy control, sluggish movement, simplistic play mechanics, and a ridiculous timer that ends your life as soon as it runs out . . . .Frankly, I'd rather play with Log!" – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Taking place during "the far-flung reaches of last week," *The Ren & Stimpy Show: Time Warp* was inspired by *The Ren & Stimpy Show* animated series created by John Kricfalusi. You and a friend guide the title characters—Ren, a psychotic Chihuahua; and Stimpy, a good-natured but dimwitted cat—as they journey through their Backyard, the Big City, a Haunted House, an Unfriendly Zoo, and the entire Untamed World.

The duo walks along collecting coins, slugs, and "Gritty Kitty proofs of purchase" as they dodge such obstacles as lightning, thrown water balloons, and falling walruses. To ward off the various enemies, including bats, mosquitoes, ghosts, and bulldogs, Ren uses an extended slapping motion while Stimpy spits hairballs. They also use these maneuvers to perform such actions as opening garbage cans (for items, including health), knocking down fences (to pass through them), and digging tunnels underground. Other activities include swinging across obstacles, crawling under obstacles, jumping on the backs of hippos and retractable platforms, using rubber bottle nipples to climb walls, and wielding such unconventional weapons as beaver saws, a watermelon bow, and mystic canoes (in which you fly through the air and hit enemies with the paddle).

Between levels there are shooter stages similar to *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders*, but you fire at logs instead of space rocks or aliens. In addition, there is forward-scrolling shooting action viewed from inside the cockpit of a flying time machine. The game includes humor that evokes the TV show, such as Ren crying and hitting himself on the head with a hammer, and the characters are voiced by Billy West, who voiced Ren and Stimpy during seasons three to five of the cartoon.

Notable Quotable:
"The animations are excellent, and their various attacks are characteristically disgusting. The control could be tweaked up a little more, but overall it's an enjoyable title." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"THQ obviously tried to make this game more challenging than previous *R&S* installments, but it may have gone too far in the other direction. Most levels relentlessly throw everything at you but the kitchen sink." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots!

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Gray Matter.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

The Ren & Stimpy Show: Veediots! lets you play through four episodes of the classic animated TV show. In "The Boy Who Cried Rat" you guide Ren—dressed as a mouse—as he is being chased though a house by Stimpy, at whom you can slap and throw logs. You will hop on tables, chairs, and bookcases, break TV screens to get items (such as money), dodge mouse traps, go behind curtains (for a 1-up), get moved along by a blowing fan, and get flung upward by a ringing phone and the spinning hands of a clock. Then, you will enter a fake mouse hole that is actually the entrance to Stimpy's mouth, where you will dodge falling food, avoid beavers, and jump on teeth and over gaps and obstacles.

"In the Army" finds Ren—clad in military attire—hopping on tree branches, grabbing money, slapping soldiers and bumblebees, walking across collapsing bridges, avoiding falling watermelons, getting shot out of cannons, gliding via umbrellas, riding logs across water, and bouncing on tires. He will also toss grenades (provided by Stimpy) at a sergeant riding atop a small tank. Next, you will control the title character in "Stimpy's Invention," where you—trying to escape a laboratory—bounce on springs, go up and down tubes, move objects to jump up to higher platforms, hop on moving platforms, mix test tube concoctions to blow open doors, use a blow-torch to cut ropes, stick out your tongue and lick to open doors, and collect items to complete the "Happy Helmet" to use on Ren.

In the final level, "Marooned"—which takes place on an alien planet—as Stimpy you get swallowed by a giant alien. As he falls down its throat, he flaps his arms to slow his fall and help dodge exotic creatures, including round, orange aliens. Once he hits bottom and reaches the platforming areas he swats his tongue at enemies, grabs green sparks to throw at enemies, uses a trash can lid to shield from flying eyeballs, stands on worms that act as moving platforms, and drops pink balls on a boss in a platform area in which the entire screen rotates. Helpful items you can grab include money (for health bonuses), health (hams, a toothbrush, etc.), boots (run faster), and powdered toast (invincibility). Also released for the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

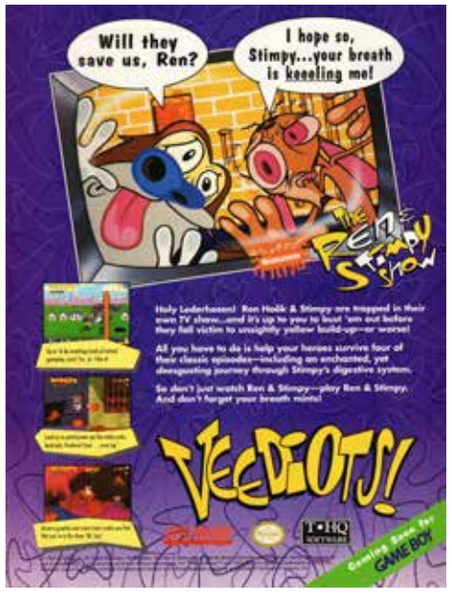
"This one really captures the mood of those bizarro cartoons. Lock up your common sense and just enjoy the ride." – *Game Players* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Ren & Stimpy* had great expectations, and it lives up to some of them (very good graphics and voice plus the clever idea of making each section based on a cartoon episode), yet the control could be improved greatly." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"A colorful, simply illustrated side-scroller . . . There are some funny inside jokes here . . . lackluster graphic style and dull gameplay . . . the graphics in this game just don't match up to the cartoon. There are no humorous interludes (unlike the Game Gear *Ren & Stimpy*, where Ren scratches his butt when you pause), and the backgrounds are uninspired . . . The sound effects are weak and barely audible. There's some familiar theme music, but the absence of certain songs is disappointing . . . it offers little challenge to the intermediate gamer. You'll probably suffer from boredom, not frustration." – *GamePro* (November 1993)



Revolution X

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Rage Software.
Game Type: First-Person Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

The New Order Nation—a corrupt alliance of government and big business—is set to take over the world. Their primary mission is to subvert the power and influence of today's youth and rid the globe of anything that is fun. Led by Headmistress Helga, their first course of action is to abduct Aerosmith, America's premier rock band. It is your job to rescue them and make life fun again.

Revolution X is based on Midway's 1994 arcade game, sans light gun support. The coin-op game also had faster gameplay, superior graphics and sounds, and more destructible backgrounds. Players guide a cursor around the screens of six scrolling levels—Los Angeles Club X, Helicopter Joyride, Amazon Jungle, Middle East, Pacific Rim, and Wembley Stadium—firing a machine gun, CDs, laserdiscs (which are more powerful than CDs), skull bombs, and a super gun at members of New Order Nation. Objectives include freeing dancing girls from a club, destroying helicopters, shooting your way inside a chemical factory in the Amazon Jungle, traveling to the Middle East to free teens from a mind control camp, destroying a chemical warehouse, and facing down the Headmistress at a Wembley Stadium Aerosmith concert.

Shooting is near constant, the game is hard (numerous continues are a must), and there is spoken dialogue by Aerosmith frontman Steven Tyler and other band members. The action still manages to be somewhat dull thanks to a slow cursor, repetitive gameplay, mindless action, and certain areas that take seemingly forever to get past. Options include three cursor speeds and three difficulty levels: outrageous, super cool, and impossible.

The SNES and Genesis versions have less blood and less revealing exotic dancers than in the arcade—they face the screen as to not show their thongs from behind. The PlayStation and Saturn versions maintain more of the blood, but keep the dancers facing the screen. Similar to *Operation Wolf* and *T2: The Arcade Game*.

Notable Quotable:
"The lack of a gun makes the cursor movement awkward and slow . . . It does retain a lot of secrets and playability of the arcade version, but its sluggishness and grainy looking graphics are just too much for me to get into this game." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"They did spend some time getting Aerosmith's guitar effects and music clips to work, but the corners cut are obvious. All the included songs are just sections of riffs from the songs themselves, with overbearing compression. Some of them loop well, like the endless riff from 'Rag Doll' that plays on the menu screens. Some of them do not, like the endless verse from 'Eat the Rich' with the same section of lyrics . . . The graphics are tolerable, but there's not a lot of eye candy here. They did some impressive things with digitized video, considering the time and the console we're talking about. You'll get jerky video messages from Aerosmith as the game progresses, just as in the arcade . . . The actual

game areas are pretty barren, especially when compared to the same zones in the arcade. About half of the decorations and/or detail have been tossed. The bar in the first level is about the most visually rich area you're going to find, which is funny because it slows the game to a near crawl . . . certain sections, like the helicopter chase and the charge of the battle-axe women in the Amazon, are just too much for the game to handle. It never gets totally unplayable, but shooting your gun alongside the digitized detail in many areas is just too taxing to calculate, so the game kicks back and takes its sweet time at about five frames per second . . . Characters are digitized rather than hand-drawn, though the detail is at an obviously lower resolution than the arcade source. They at least don't look out of place with their environment, but you rarely get close enough to them to appreciate any detail. The super close-ups, where enemies pop up in your face in the arcade, didn't make the cut here . . . *Revolution X* could actually be fun in the arcades when you had impressive graphics, a speedy pace, a total lack of dull moments, and completely destructible environments." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:
During the early '90s, Aerosmith was everywhere, and rightfully so. They were at the height of their return to the rock scene. While they never truly crossed over to any other art forms like film or TV, they did take part in one of the most unusual games of the era. I remember the first time I saw *Revolution X* in the arcade. I had no quarters to play, but could not help standing there in awe, not only of the soundtrack that included their actual songs, but also of the playful video graphics that showed the band getting kidnapped. Aerosmith's music worked well with the rail-based shooter style employed by the game. You would fire your gun and throw CDs to blow up enemies on the screen. It was a ridiculous concept, but with the idea that music is your weapon against the oppressor, it made the game a certain kind of silly fun.

Even at the time I knew it was ambitious for a game like *Revolution X* to be ported to a home console. Real music simply did not exist on home machines outside of the CD-based systems. My brother and I were blown away when we finally got to rent the game we thought was impossible. All the members of Aerosmith were actually talking instead of using dialogue boxes. Even the pixilated video of the band members gave us a level of interaction we had never seen before on the Super Nintendo. While the SNES game did not quite hold up to its arcade counterpart, it was a game I happily rented many times until I finally got a copy of my own. – Zoe K. Howard

Rex Ronan: Experimental Surgeon

Publisher: Raya Systems.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Educational/ Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

As Rex Ronan, you must shrink yourself down to "near-microscopic" size and enter the body of Jake Westboro (including his mouth, trachea, lungs, bronchial tubes, arteries, heart, and brain), a salesman for the fictional Blackburn Tobacco Company who has been a smoker since he was fifteen. To save Jake and rid him of his nicotine addiction, you must laser away tar, plaque, phlegm, and pre-cancerous cells, along with shooting mechanical vehicles. You can grab red molecules to restore ammo, blue to recover health, green for extra lives, and yellow for weapon power-ups.

The game is a run-and-gun (more like "walk-and-gun"), *Contra*-esque platform shooter (your weapon is similar to the flamethrower in *Contra*) with a storyline lifted from the movie *Fantastic Voyage* (1966). Along the way, you will learn of the dangers of smoking cigarettes. In certain areas you will pilot a ship (viewed from behind), firing at enemies while traveling through bronchial tubes and blood vessels. Raya Systems published three other educational action games for the SNES: *Captain Novolin*, *Packy & Marlon*, and *Bronkie the Bronchiasaurus*.

Notable Quotable:
"*Rex* does a decent job decoding dull stats into an entertaining action game." – *Game Players* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"This game doesn't just warn about the dangers of smoking—it also demonstrates the dangers of awful game design . . . Each level feels as though platforms and enemies were placed everywhere without any thought at all. Depending on the level, there are differently labeled blobs of bad stuff to destroy such as tar residue and pre-cancerous cells, but removing them is a monotonous task that only raises your completion percentage at the end of the level . . . The trivia 'smart bombs' are mostly unnecessary and work in the unintuitive way of requiring you to shoot them to reveal the question, then touching it if true or avoiding it if false . . . I actually go out of my way to try out terrible games, and thanks to the clunky controls, thoughtless level design, and ridiculous story, this is easily one of the most poorly designed games I've ever played." – What They Call Games (www.whattheycallgames.com)

Riddick Bowe Boxing

Publisher: Extreme Entertainment.
Developer: Malibu Interactive.
Game Type: Sports/Boxing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Riddick Bowe Boxing offers arcade-style action that is similar to *Evander Holyfield's "Real Deal" Boxing* for the Genesis (complete with 2D horizontal perspective and damage meters for the boxer's body and head), but with cartoonish graphics and featuring a different superstar. Players—observing the action from a side-view, waist-up perspective—must battle twenty-four ranked fighters (in Career mode) prior to stepping into the ring with Bowe himself (there are sixty-five opponents in all). Prospective pugilists can create and save up to seven of their own boxers (which are cartoonish in appearance), customizing such features as name, face, hair, skin, gloves, and trunks.

After each fight, players can go to the gym to increase the power, speed, and/or agility of their character. As your fighter ages he gains experience, and he must retire after forty fights. Boxers speak some trash talk, such as "You're going down" and the politically incorrect "You fight like a girl." The action is viewed close-up, but a radar at the top of the screen shows your position in the ring. (The radar is side-view, unlike *"Real Deal" Boxing*, which has a top-down radar.) Modes of play include One Player Match, Two Player Match, and Career Mode. See also: *Chavez* (in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*).

Notable Quotable:

"The latest in a long line of average boxing simulations. *Bowe* isn't bad—it's just been done before. Create a fighter, then go for the title. Stop us if you've heard it before." – *Game Players* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*Riddick Bowe Boxing* is a good choice for boxing fans who prefer an arcade style of fighting over a simulation, as it features large, colorful fighters and challenging 'punch till your fingers bleed' gameplay . . . there are 65 different boxers that you can challenge, each with his own style of fighting. This gives them a sense of personality: one fighter might attack the body, one may concentrate on the face, another will patiently sit back and counter your moves . . . Some missing ingredients are different boxer heights, weight classes, real boxers (other than Bowe), specific ratings for certain punches (like right jab or left hook), and different reaches." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:
As a software consultant, I attended the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) twice a year to evaluate the upcoming round of games. I worked for a chain of rental stores, and they used my recommendations when placing their orders. In 1993, I attended CES with another objective: to land a development job. I had just completed my masters' degree in animation and had several interviews set up during the show.

I met with Blue Sky Software, Sega of America, Tengen, Ocean, Interplay, Sports Sciences, Inc., and a few others. While most of the interviews went relatively well, I was quite green to the industry, so none of them really panned out. One interview was particularly bad and a total disaster; I left my interview with Viacom—a newcomer to the industry—insulted and humiliated.

Beaten and with my head hanging low, and not even wanting to enter the room, I faced my final interview of the show, which was with Extreme Entertainment, the publisher of *Chavez* and *Riddick Bowe Boxing*. Feeling like a boxer on a losing streak, I am not sure if Denny Thorley read my mind or not, but he seemed to do his best to prop me up. He did not have a position for me either, but he made me feel like a million bucks. As I was exiting, he introduced me to his next appointment, who had his own entourage and was clearly very important, as "the next up-and-coming star animator in the industry!" I have mostly forgotten our conversation during the interview over the years, but I never forgot how Mr. Thorley made me feel.

Upon release, I immediately bought a copy of *Riddick Bowe Boxing*, if only to salute his kindness toward me. When playing the game, I visualized my opponents as the panel of Viacom interviewees . . . and never lost a match! – Michael Thomasson

Rise of the Phoenix

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

Set in ancient China after the death of the First Emperor, *Rise of the Phoenix* has players as one of two rival warlords—Liu Bang or Xiang Yu—battling for control of the country. Liu Bang has lesser stats for Politics and Skills, but his Charisma is high, meaning it is easy for him to make allies. Xiang Yu, on the other hand, has high personal stats and a lower Charisma rating.

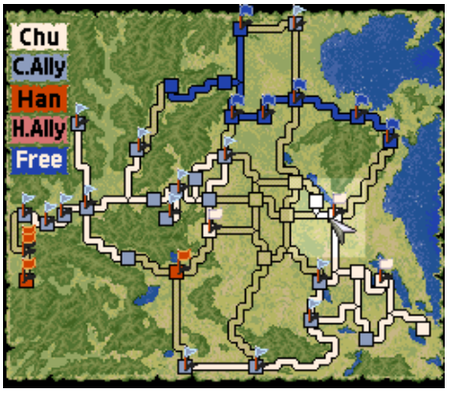
You can go head-to-head against the computer or battle a friend for control of the nation's thirty-nine cities. Gameplay consists of viewing overhead maps; raising taxes in occupied territories to build armies; sending units on secret night attacks; battling in open fields and outside city walls; damming up rivers to flood enemy fortresses; setting up ambushes; engaging in one-on-one duels atop horseback; using arrows, catapults, and battering rams to attack enemy strongholds; and more.

Unlike Koei's more well-known *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Rise of the Phoenix* divides turns into "planning," where you decide where to bulk up your defense and who to ally with; and "action," where you move your units and start battles. The story takes place in a five-year time period (during the real life Chu-Han Contention, which occurred between 206–202 BCE), but the player will not be penalized if they do not finish the game in five years or less. Originally a computer game (from 1993), *Rise of the Phoenix* was revamped for the PlayStation in 1998, but that version failed to reach the US.

Notable Quotable:
"For those who like this type of game, *Rise of the Phoenix* is an excellent strategic war simulation. However, fast-action fans will probably be repelled by the deliberate pacing." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"Even if these games are slower and more tedious than they need to be, fans of Koei's historical RPGs will enjoy *Rise of the Phoenix*. It incorporates many familiar features and adds a few new ones." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The crisp controls make *Phoenix* a sort of 'Koei lite.' Because the basic strategy is to quickly move through conquered cities, you don't have to spend as much time building long-term profit centers to fuel your military forces. Instead, you can usually shake down the suffering townspeople for gold, provisions, and draftees, and then just cut out of town for the next fight! Battles are also streamlined. The view is limited to basically two scenes, a castle siege and an open-field, mounted melee. Only the siege scenario has individual fighting units, and you can position them. The graphics are typically Koei: sharp but static. There are plenty of handsome face shots of generals and adversaries. Nicely detailed battle graphics make the tiny combatants look good, but primitive animation gives them little pizzazz. Gentle, unobtrusive Asian music dominates the sparse sounds. The battle noises, however, are strictly expendable." – *Game Pro* (May 1995)



Rise of the Robots

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Mirage Technologies.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Widely regarded as one of the worst one-on-one fighting games of all time, the heavily hyped *Rise of the Robots* has pre-rendered CGI visuals (as opposed to pixel art or digitized sprites), giving it a nice, futuristic look. However, the gameplay is so slow and clunky you may mistake it for *Rocky Super Action Boxing* for the ColecoVision (a game I enjoyed back in the day, but that has not held up very well).

In one-player mode, gamers battle as the sleekly designed ECO35-2 Cyborg (turbo head butt, shoulder barge) going one-on-one against The Loader Droid (fork slash), The BHFO3 Builder Droid (pile driver, bomber jump), The Crusher Droid (pincer mincer), Military Droid (catapult spin, cyber slash), The Sentry (flying jet kick), and the Supervisor Droid (morphing ability). Standard fighting moves include block, jump, and crouch, and light, medium, and hard punches and kicks. In two-player mode, one gamer controls ECO35-2 Cyborg while the other controls one of the other robots.

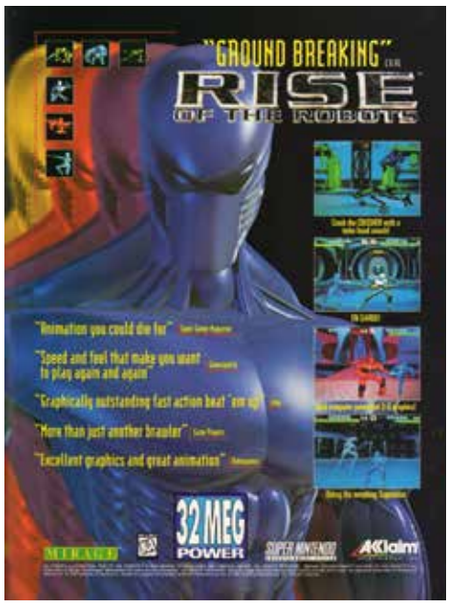
The game includes riveting and distinctive music from Queen's Brian May, and it features some good, if somewhat redundant, sound effects. The clashing and clanging of metal on metal as the warriors fight sounds clear and realistic. If you play this game long enough, your hands will begin to ache from trying to coerce more action out of your fighter than he is capable of.

The 3DO and CD-i versions of *Rise of the Robots*, which was originally developed for the Amiga and PC, have a fully animated intro, but music does not play during fights in the 3DO game. Also released on the Game Gear and Mega Drive (but not the Genesis). Amazingly, despite its lethargic gameplay, *Rise of the Robots* spawned a sequel: *Rise 2: Resurrection* (PlayStation, Saturn).

Fun Fact: In 1995, an arcade version of *Rise of the Robots* was released in the UK.

Notable Quotable:
"As a game that was originally designed for PC, *Rise of the Robots* offers impressive graphics and a solid soundtrack. But the old phrase 'never judge a book by its cover' applies here, since there is not much beyond visual appeal to hold your interest." – *Game Players* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"*Rise of the Robots* suffers from poor control and few special moves. The graphics are very good, but the lack of variety hampers the overall effect. Cool-looking fighters and a good idea, but it just doesn't work." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1995)



Insider Insight:
Rise of the Robots was one of those games I was really looking forward to that let me down so much it was actually emotionally painful. Nowadays, if I get into a disappointing game I just yank it out and queue up another. For some reason when I was young it was almost as if I took bad games personally.

When *Rise of the Robots* was released, I was fresh out of college and in great financial stress. If I remember correctly, Super Nintendo games in those days commonly retailed for around $50. Luckily (or not) I could rent games at Blockbuster, which at the time was a really good place to do so. This was before they went absolutely bananas with late fees, creating so much poor will the business was crushed when a viable competitor appeared (take your pick of Redbox or Netflix).

I knew some of the guys at the local Blockbuster, so the game was on hold for me. I knew that morning that I would be playing the game right after work. I thought about it all day. Wow, that sounds dorky, and of course it was an entirely misplaced thought. I am not sure why I was looking forward to it so much. I was just really into fighting games at the time, and the buzz was *Rise of the Robots* would have the best graphics of any video game, period.

Well, the graphics weren't all that bad, and with all the futuristic fonts and techno music and "grid active" business, I daresay the game presentation-wise was a couple years ahead of its time. Then I started to play it. The mechanics are so bad you can't throw a punch when the other character is in the middle of an animation—it's like turn-based fighting. Add on top of that the poor hit detection, and then add on top of *that* the miniscule hit damage. It is like a *Street Fighter* game with worn-out buttons in which every single hit only does chip damage. Should 90% of Player 1 vs. CPU battles end in a timeout?

How bad is *Rise of the Robots*? There is a site called ranker.com that takes votes on such things, and *Rise of the Robots* is ranked dead last out of fifty-six SNES fighters. – Jeff Belmonte

Rival Turf!

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Jaleco.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

An obvious clone of *Final Fight*—Capcom's brilliant arcade brawler from 1989—*Rival Turf!* looks a lot like the game it copies, and the side-scrolling action is roughly similar, but it comes up short in several key areas. Poor collision detection and lightweight fighting action makes it feel like punches and kicks do not really connect. Enemies, such as biker Case, judo expert Kato, and black belt Goro, are not as cool as those in *Final Fight*. (There are twelve enemy types in all.) The music has nice instrumentation, but the sound effects get old in a hurry.

On a more positive note, the game offers two-player simultaneous action, which the *SNES* port of *Final Fight* left out. There is also a one-on-one Player Versus Player fighting mode. Levels, which you battle through as street toughs Jack Flak, leader of an American task force; or "Oozie" Nelson, a Mexican military officer, include: Police Station, City Stadium, Skyscraper, Southern Mountain, Southern Port, and The Hideout. Each level has a boss, such as the breakdancing Sledge or the spinning, whirling Ice Man.

Flak and Nelson are outfitted with a variety of fighting moves, such as jab, punch, sliding kick, flying kick, body slam, leg sweep, grab and flip, uppercut, and/or pile driver. They can also pick up weapons, including a knife, wrench, baseball bat, dynamite, hand grenade, brick, and a rock.

Released in Japan as *Rushing Beat*. Followed by *Brawl Brothers* and *The Peace Keepers*.

Notable Quotable:
"A dull, uninspired, and stupidly easy beat 'em up. It might feature two-player action, but other than that *Final Fight* beats the pants off it." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"I enjoyed most of the urban scenery (like the bus ride), but a few areas are boring (like the locker room and parking garage). You'll see some nice city skylines, but in later stages the action moves south of the border where the scenery is exceptionally bland. The mediocre audio features repetitive tunes and muffled sound effects. The two-player mode exhibits some slow-down, but the single-player action is highly playable. *Rival Turf!* is as derivative as they come, but if you're okay with that, you'll have a good time." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

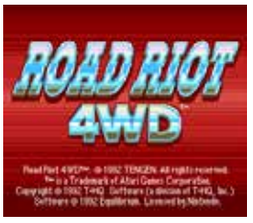
Insider Insight:
For me, *Rival Turf!* will always be *Rushing Beat* (as it is known in Japan), and that is somewhat strange coming from an American. In a time when "beat-'em-ups" were all the rage (and *Streets of Rage* was all the rage), *Rushing Beat* was an import my family obtained from a local gaming shop that specialized in Japanese titles. It may be considered pretty average for the genre these days, but the catchy music, fun protagonists, and great use of color always keep me coming back. Well, and the groin kick attack, which was sadly removed from the American version of the game. –Tyler Esposito

Insider Insight:
When I was growing up, I could rent games pretty regularly with my allowance, but getting a new game to keep involved either Christmas or my birthday. One birthday was especially generous. It started with a trip to the store, and my mom said I could pick any two games I wanted. This was a shock, as I usually only got one. Taking advantage of this, I grabbed a game I had already rented and loved (*Legend of the Mystical Ninja*) and figured I would blindly grab a game I had never heard of. Not because that was my plan, but that's how it turned out.

That game was *Rival Turf!* It was not available for rent at my usual video store, and I did not remember seeing it in any magazine. I looked at the back of the box, and it looked like a fun beat-'em-up like *Final Fight*, only this game was two-player, unlike *Final Fight*. That one selling point was all I needed to know. I got home and popped it in. I always pick whatever character does wrestling moves (there seems to be one in every game), and to my joy, he did a power bomb. The power bomb was my favorite wrestling maneuver, and I had never seen it on a video game before. I called over my next door neighbor and we ended up beating it in our first session of playing—I wasn't mad at all. – John Riggs

Road Riot 4WD

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Equilibrium.
Game Type: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



A lousy port of Atari's 1991 arcade game—which offered a two-player sit-down model with a "thumper" in each seat to provide physical feedback when you got hit—*Road Riot 4WD* for the SNES suffers from poor controls and a slow, jerky framerate. Two-player action is split-screen, which is understandable, but the one-player mode is split-screen as well—a stupid and unnecessary deviation from the coin-op version. Unlike the arcade game, players can select from three difficulty levels: rookie, intermediate, and pro. Noobs can start off on a beginner track.

On paper, the game, which is viewed from behind your dune buggy as you race (against three rivals in each region) on twisting, turning, hilly tracks, sounds cool. You can shoot at your opponents with an unlimited supply of missiles, slam into certain obstacles to score points (a precursor of the *Burnout* series), do somersaults and spinouts, bump other cars off the road, and race in eleven locations: Antarctica, Australia, Africa, Saudi Arabia, the Swiss Alps, Baja Mexico, Iowa, Ohio, Las Vegas, New Jersey, and California. Small radar screens show a birds-eye view of the tracks, and a "host" character, such as "Nasty" Nelson or a politically incorrect Arab named Sheik Ah Legg, appears before each race.

Fun Fact: A sequel called *Road Riot's Revenge* was produced for the arcades in 1993, but it was never released to the public.

Notable Quotable:

"Laggy control scheme, mediocre visuals, and god-awful sound effects . . . vehicles stutter and move at a slow pace . . . do yourself a favor and stay away from this." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It's just not good . . . You can't see where you are going . . . The framerate is horrible . . . There're obstacles all over the track that you're going to crash into because you can't see them or avoid them, which slows down an already slow and painful game . . . At least the people you run over make screaming sounds, so it's got that going for it, and the music is pretty entertaining, but the rest of the game is terrible." – Lord Carnage (YouTube)

Road Runner's Death Valley Rally

Publisher: Sunsoft.
Developer: ICOM Simulations.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

As Road Runner, you speed through a cartoon-like world, dodging Wile E. Coyote (who stays in hot pursuit) and his contraptions (catapults, rocket skates, mine carts, and the like) while pecking or skidding into such enemies as bats, monkeys, snakes, scorpions, and Marvin the Martian. You must be in close proximity to peck enemies. Pecking is also used to battle bosses (ACME devices) and gobble birdseed, the latter of which fills the turbo speed meter, enabling Road Runner to run faster, jump farther, and ascend steep angles. This is important—at least for those trying to get a high score—because if you finish a stage within five minutes you get bonus points.

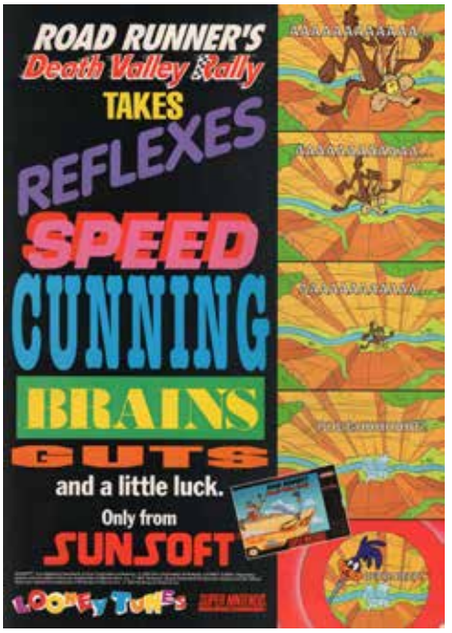
Other challenges include searching for shortcuts and flags (of varying point totals), some of which are well-hidden. For every twenty flags you find, you will get an extra continue. You will also leap over or otherwise dodge such obstacles as cacti, ravines, drills, spikes, and bombs. Road Runner will often run at breakneck speeds up and down hills similar to Sonic the Hedgehog, but he is impervious to enemies and their attacks when running at turbo speed. Also helpful are such items as 1-ups, clocks (which freeze enemies), hearts (which fill up Road Runner's health meter), shields (which make Road Runner invincible), and parachutes (which can contain any helpful item other than bird seed).

Road Runner's Death Valley Rally consists of five stages, each with four sublevels. Stages include Zippity Splat, Rock 'N' Rivet, Train Runnery, Hopalong Casualty, and Quantum Beep. The game is based on the classic Looney Tunes characters and includes Road Runner's patented "beep beep" sound, along with the classical Merrie Melodies theme song, "Merrily We Roll Along."

Notable Quotable:
"All looks and no gameplay, *Road Runner* is a poorly designed, highly frustrating, and very disappointing game which does no justice to the license whatsoever." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (Nov., 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"The idea of a Road Runner game is cool, and the folks at Sunsoft seem to be fans of the Warner Bros. classic, and it shows. The colors and graphics give you the feel of controlling a cartoon. With large levels, nice scrolls, and fast action, *Death Valley Rally* is a top-notch action game." – *GameFan Magazine* (January 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"In the early '90s, graphic technology had advanced to the point where cartoon characters could be pretty faithfully rendered in a video game. Players were intrigued by the prospect of controlling their favorite Saturday morning personalities, and *Death Valley Rally* generated a lot of buzz for this reason . . . The characters are rendered using large sprites, and Wile E. Coyote can be seen using all of his famous contraptions . . . this is one impressive-looking game . . . Sunsoft was somewhat less successful when it came to recreating the frenetic action of the cartoon . . . Some stages feature long stretches that allow Road Runner to zip around, but there's a lot more precision jumping than I expected . . . The floaty jumps provide some room for error, but when the screen scrolls upward it's hard to tell where you're about to land. The coyote enters at random intervals, and he's often hard to avoid due to his size . . . The scenery isn't very interesting, but it's always fun to see what new kind of contraption the coyote has rigged up . . . Watching him meet his demise is amusing . . . The stages are relatively short, but the lack of a password feature is glaring." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



RoboCop 3

Publisher: Ocean of America.
Developer: Ocean Software.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Released before the 1993 film starring Robert John Burke (Peter Weller sat this one out) in the title role, *RoboCop 3* takes place in crumbling sewers, at an abandoned church, in OPC headquarters, and on the mean streets of burned-out Detroit. In four of the game's six levels you, as RoboCop, walk, jump, duck, climb stairs, and ride elevators and moving platforms, but in the other two you will don a jet pack for vertical-scrolling, flight-based shooter action. The platform levels are timed while the flying areas scroll automatically.

You begin the game armed with a single-shot pistol for shooting enemies (many of which are palette-swapped), but can upgrade to a much-needed flamethrower, missile launcher, three-way pistol, and laser gun. Ammo is limited, meaning RoboCop must sometimes rely on his fists. Much like the film on which it is based, the game is a violent exercise in futility. The platform shooter action rarely strays from its single-minded purpose of advancing from left to right, shooting or punching everything and everyone in sight. The title character ambles slowly along like a sitting duck, getting pummeled by enemy fire, shooting back more as a defensive mechanism than in active confrontation. Not only is RoboCop slow and limited in movement, he is awkward to maneuver because of sluggish controls, and he looks like a squatty blow-up doll.

You could argue that he walks true to form (he is equally slow and cumbersome in the *RoboCop* films), but a video game is not a movie, just as a movie is not a novel. You have got to make certain concessions to the medium; a slow, unwieldy protagonist rarely makes for a good character in an action title. Further, the vertical levels, in which RoboCop flies over the city shooting bullets and missiles, are unimaginative. Formulaic, mindless shooters can be great fun from time to time, but *RoboCop 3* is a bore. At least there are ninjas.

The Genesis version has more options, including number of lives and difficulty level selection. Also released for the Game Gear. The NES version has some major differences, such as the ability for the player to repair damaged body parts.

Notable Quotable:

"What really rankles is that Ocean can produce a game as brilliant as *The Addams Family* and follow it with this! Come on, Ocean, if you set such high standards you should live up to them." – *N-Force* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"A bland, frustrating, and totally unoriginal game which is a gross disappointment on a grand scale, especially when you consider the excitement and action of the *RoboCop* films." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"We had no designs or concept sketches or anything; we were just told to get on with it. We weren't exactly excited about the prospect of working on *RoboCop 3* . . . I didn't put much effort into it, the design of stuff. I just wanted it done and get it out of the way." – *RoboCop 3* animator Bill Harbison (Oliver Harper's Lets Play Retro, YouTube)

RoboCop Versus The Terminator

Publisher: Virgin Games.
Developer: Interplay.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

RoboCop Versus The Terminator is based on the classic Dark Horse comic book series, which blended two of Hollywood's most famous blockbuster franchises. According to the manual, "In the near future, the worlds of RoboCop and The Terminator merge into a single reality. Machines rule the Earth, and Skynet is supreme. You, as RoboCop, must save mankind by destroying the Skynet super computer." You will walk, jump, climb (ladders), fly (via jetpack), move hand-over-hand on wires, and duck under enemy fire as you shoot your way through a construction site, a research facility, an abandoned building, a Terminator factory, and downtown.

The storyline plays out through narrative cutscenes; something lacking in the much different Genesis game of the same name, in which RoboCop uncharacteristically moves much faster. The SNES game has no blood or voice effects, but there is still plenty of action, as he can equip the following weapons, each of which contains unlimited ammo: a pistol, ED-209 Gatling gun, missile launcher, plasma rifle, laser gun, seeker missile launcher, and a combo weapon (plasma rifle/grenade launcher). RoboCop, who can keep and switch between two different weapons, also picks up smart bombs, RoboCop heads (1-ups), flashing RoboCop heads (invincibility), and life boosters (increase life bar).

There is a first-person shooter level in the SNES cart that is missing from the Genesis game. Both versions have solid (if difficult) gameplay and nice graphics, though the Genesis game is darker and grittier, and has more realistic-looking characters. The SNES cartridge was originally encased in a nifty hard plastic shell (as opposed to the typical flimsy cardboard box). Convenient four-letter passwords let you save your progress.

Notable Quotable:
"Nice try, but this just doesn't happen for me. The blood, of course, is gone and the Mode 7 sequence is very slow and choppy. The comic book-esque cinema sequences are innovative and new, but the intensity isn't there." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Enemy projectiles move very slowly (almost comically so), so even if you can't shoot them down, you can usually outrun them . . . .Breaking up the monotony is a first-person shooting sequence not unlike the Sandspeeder stage in *Super Star Wars* . . . For bosses you'll face a massive terminator 'tank' and an amazing hologram face composed of electrical charges. The game's ominous, bass-heavy soundtrack is appropriate but not particularly memorable. *RoboCop Versus The Terminator*'s main flaw is the preponderance of cheap hits, including falling girders at the construction site and twirly-bird things that emerge from the floors of the factory stage . . . a terrific way to let off some steam." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
There may come a point in your gaming life when you are on a quest to add good video games to your library, but none of the games you find grab your attention. With so many games out in the wild, it is easy to get overwhelmed by the sheer amount (and genres) available. This happened to me a few years ago when I entered a local game store; nothing really spoke to me that day. The owner and I had been good friends for over a decade, and he often tried to predict the kind of games I would be interested in. He frequently miscalculated what I might find appealing, so I took his choices with a grain of salt. Still, I did not see anything of interest that day, but if he had something worth checking out, I was all for it.

After going into the back of the store, he brought out a handful of games that had recently been brought in for trade. On the top was a game with a title that sparked interest to any fan of the '80s: *Robocop vs. Terminator*. Could there be any more '80s action nostalgia rolled into one game? Let alone a game based on two hit movie franchises. I made my purchase and left the store wondering what the game would be like. With a quick cleaning of the game, I popped it in and welcomed the platforming style, the dark atmosphere, and the difficulty level that was true to the era. I sat with a smile on my face, enjoying one of the most '80s action film-infused games I have ever encountered. – Zoe K. Howard

Robotrek

Publisher: Enix.
Developer: Ancient/Quintet.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

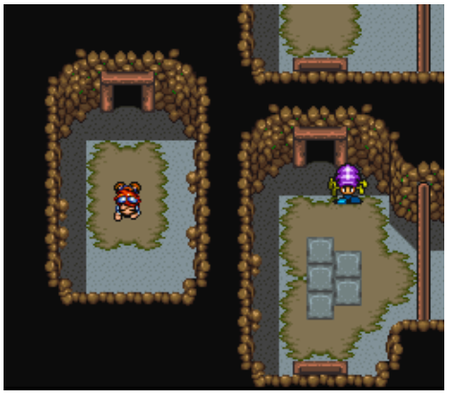
A rogue band of pirates called the Hackers has invaded the idyllic town of Rococo, using androids to terrorize its citizens. A young boy who recently moved to Rococo longs to be an inventor like his father, Dr. Akihibara. To save the day, he builds and programs robots to fight the enemies.

The boy, who you control, can build and maintain up to three different robots, strategically customizing them with various weapons, special attacks, and degrees of speed, energy, power, and defense. You also name the robot and select its color, and you can make your own colors by mixing red, green, and blue. You will spend much of the game viewing the action from overhead, traveling through an assortment of areas (forests, rivers, caves, castles, houses, and the like), conversing with townsfolk, and using items for drilling in rock and walls, disappearing, opening locked doors, controlling the weather, changing into a mouse (for talking to mice and passing through small openings), and more.

In battle scenes—which are viewed from the side and enable you to gain experience—you can use such weapons as bombs, guns, shields, smoke, and swords. Command choices during battle include attack, defend, escape, and item. Battles use a variation of the ATB (Active Time Battle) system, in which you must wait for a charge meter to fill before making your move. Setting *Robotrek* apart from the pack is your ability to combine items, including your own inventions, to create other items. When combining weapons you can create a more powerful weapon, but be careful, because you might create a useless one. You will get your ideas for the types of items to invent by talking to people, and by reading books. You can also clean, cure, and repair your robots. Released as *Slapstick* in Japan.

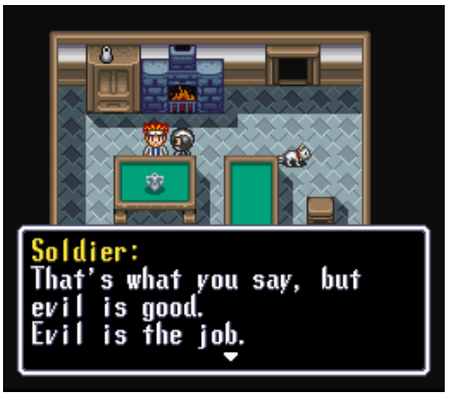
Notable Quotable:
"The constant construction and invention of new items add an interesting twist to what would already be a solid RPG. The game takes you along a fairly linear path . . . there are plenty of hints along the way . . . a fun choice for players without much RPG experience." – *Game Players* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"*Robotrek* was meant for children, but it has a decent replay value, a large variety of enemies, a peculiar battle system, and countless secret areas to explore. You can't get tired of the music without a struggle and the story was surprisingly well done. I think this game deserved a lot more attention than it got." – RPGfan (www.rpgfan.com)



Robotrek

Notable Quotable:
"The game is a lot of fun. It's a lighthearted, not-so-serious RPG. It's pretty short for an RPG, so it's a nice change of pace from the sometimes heavy, overwrought landscape of old-school role-playing games . . . It plays sorta like a proto *Pokémon*, only without all the collecting stuff. I really like the customization the game offers. It lends itself to a lot of possibilities. You can make your robot like a tank, big, strong, and slow, or you can make a quick striking machine . . . Programming your own special custom attacks is also cool . . . There's a lot of grinding in *Robotrek*, but the battles don't take too long . . . messing with the robots to come up with new and different ways to beat enemies is kind of addicting . . . The battle music gets old pretty quick . . . The music in the rest of the game is just okay." – SNES drunk (YouTube)



Insider Insight:
While growing up in the '90s, there were few things that could keep my attention, but video games somehow fought through all the distractions of rapidly changing technology and gripped my soul in such a manner that it changed how I looked at the world.

During my time in school, I struggled with reading and writing because of severe dyslexia and dysgraphia, but all of that changed thanks to a hot summer and an RPG about robots. Before that summer my teacher had suggested for me to catch up on my reading, and my parents created a deal: if I could read a book within a week, I could rent a single game for the weekend.

As fate would have it, *Robotrek* was at my local Blockbuster. The game appealed to me initially because of the *Legend of Zelda*-style graphics and the overworld looking similar to *Super Mario World*. When I got home and put the cartridge into my Super Nintendo and booted it up, at first I was disappointed I would spend my time reading. Begrudgingly I started playing the game, and after about an hour, I had done a complete 180. For the first time, I found something I wanted to read—a video game!

After a long weekend in which I played through as much of *Robotrek* as I could I had to return it to the store. My parents said that if I could finish five chapter books in a month, they would buy it for me.

Before I played *Robotrek* reading was a constant struggle, and games were something I could do without having to read much more than the title screen, but the game challenged me to engage with the story and actually got me excited to read! *Robotrek* challenged me to think about story and how stories and narratives drive games forward.

Writing for games became something I would aim to do in the future and is something I am still working toward to this day. *Robotrek* introduced me to the notion that games were more than just entertainment—they could also be stories and narratives of other worlds. Not only that, it gave me the drive to learn to work with my learning disability and it established my lifelong love for RPGs. – Michael Nestick

Rock N' Roll Racing

Publisher: Interplay Productions.
Developer: Silicon & Synapse.
Game Type: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

One of the more highly regarded racing games of the 16-bit era, *Rock N' Roll Racing* is somewhat similar to *Championship Pro-Am*, with players driving laps around twisting, turning tracks viewed from an isometric perspective. The game boasts five funky hot rods to drive, six planets to race on (each with sixteen different tracks), and digitized instrumental takes on such rock music classics as "Bad to the Bone" (George Thorogood and the Destroyers), "Paranoid" (Black Sabbath), "Born to Be Wild" (Steppenwolf), "Highway Star" (Deep Purple), and "Radar Love" (Golden Earring). The "Peter Gunn Theme" is also included (perhaps as a nod to the arcade classic, *Spy Hunter*). Real-life racing commentator Larry "Supermouth" Huffman chimes in with such remarks as "The stage is set; the green flag drops!," "Olaf is dominating the race!," and "Rip looks lost out there!"

Placing in the top three (of four) cars lets players earn points to advance and money to purchase such items as a plasma rifle, rogue missiles, mines, slip sauce (oil slicks), engines, tires, shocks, and armor. Racing takes precedence over shooting and dropping hazards on the track, but it is highly satisfying to blow away a car to pass it, especially when nearing the finish line. Racers include Snake Sanders, Viper MacKay, Cyberhawk, Grinder X19 (a sinister-looking robot), Ivan Zypher (a doglike creature), Ragewortt, Katarina Lyons (a humanoid lioness), Road Kill Kelly (a criminal), Jake Badlands, Butcher Icebone, Tarquinn (a pointy-eared fellow), J. B. Slash, and twins Rip and Shred.

The SNES game has slightly sharper graphics and sounds than its Genesis counterpart, but the Genny cart runs a little faster. Both feature a split-screen two-player mode. Also released for the Game Boy Advance. Similar to *Biker Mice from Mars*.

Fun Fact: The Game Boy Advance version of *Rock N' Roll Racing* uses an EEPROM chip to save progress instead of a password system.

Notable Quotable:
"It has the potential to be superb, but the track boundaries almost ruin it. With a bit more freedom to roam with your mean machine, this could have challenged *Micro Machines*." – *Total!* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"*Rock N' Roll Racing* is great. Don't think it's being marketed solely on the gimmick of having great classic rock tracks. Not at all. In fact, it's a superb game with the music as a bonus. Buy it." – *Games Master* (September 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"*Rock N' Roll Racing* was one of the best games released in the 16-bit era . . . One can't help but to think that it inspired and paved the way for games such as *Wipeout* and *Extreme G*. It exhibited tight control, excellent graphics, and an unprecedented soundtrack. This game was simple in concept and flawless in execution." – Nintendojo (www.nintendojo.com)

Insider Insight:
When we first fired up *Rock N' Roll Racing*, we knew it was going to be "Bad to the Bone!"—mostly thanks to a MIDI version of George Thorogood's rock classic spilling from the television speakers. The game was vehicular combat at its best, and the isometric perspective gave a great angle on the gameplay. My good friend Jay Sorrell and I would blast missiles and other explosive implements of destruction in harm's way of each other all while swerving to avoid mines, slip sauce, snow drifts, and even molten lava! The souped-up vehicles made us feel like spies when the "Peter Gunn Theme" played. In fact, the soundtrack by Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Steppenwolf, and other rock legends really rocked the SNES. The character list was outright silly, and we would fight over who would get to play as the Wookie-wannabe character Ivan Zypher. The computer commentator, "Loudmouth Larry," was such a hoot. I can still hear him bellow, "Let the carnage begin!" Good times!
– Michael Thomasson

The Rocketeer

Publisher: Information Global Services.
Developer: NovaLogic.
Game Type: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

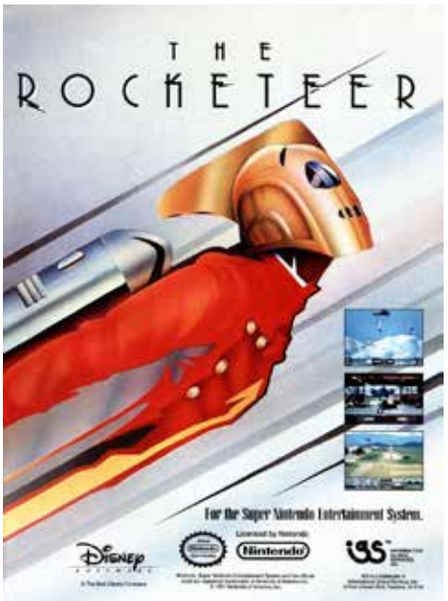
Based on Disney's 1991 feature film, which in turn was based on Dave Stevens' comic book, *The Rocketeer* casts players in the role of America's number one pilot of the 1930s, who not only flies planes, but also dons a rocket pack. The game has colorful, detailed, digitized graphics and pleasant music (despite lacking the flair and drama of Danny Elfman's film score), but the gameplay itself is weak. Two of the eight stages—the Airplane Race and the Hangar Shoot—repeat themselves without good reason.

The Airplane Race, viewed from a unique, 3D side-angle perspective, consists of circling around an airfield, trying to stay close to the pylons without hitting them or the other planes. It is dull and awkward to control. In The Hangar Shootout, you view the Rocketeer from behind as he walks back and forth and hovers in the air, shooting enemies that barely move and only pop up in a few places. You aim by guiding a cursor, which is unusual, since you can also see your character.

The Final Fight climax is dreadful, featuring some of the hokiest fighting action (aboard a zeppelin) you will ever experience. All the tiny figures can do is punch, duck, and walk very slowly. The rest of the game is mediocre side-scrolling shooter action via the Rocketeer's rocket pack, shooting and dodging airplanes, bombs, and bad guys, or aboard the Locust ship, firing at rockets and mini dirigibles. The game is beatable in less than half an hour. Much different than the NES platformer of the same name.

Notable Quotable:
"*The Rocketeer* lacks control, but the graphics are excellent; while the music is good, the fun factor quickly drops to boring. This is a good game, but the comic is better." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Although the graphics and sound pull you into this game, the disappointing action doesn't keep you. The shoot 'em and slug 'em fights are too easy to win and the ending 'reward' sequence isn't worth the wait. Unfortunately, this Rocketeer just doesn't fly." – *GamePro* (May 1992)



Insider Insight:
I got my SNES for Christmas in 1993—two years after its North American launch—and a lot of other people in my hometown did that year as well. My system came with *Super Mario World*. I wanted to catch up on other titles, but places that rented video games (we didn't have a chain like Blockbuster where I grew up) never had any SNES games. Things got so desperate that we started hitting up gas stations at exactly 6:00 p.m. (when people started returning games) to try and increase our luck, which eventually led to renting *The Rocketeer*.

I had played *The Rocketeer* on NES and thought, "This must be better than that one because this is on the Super Nintendo!" I was wrong. Horribly, horribly wrong. If you saw *The Rocketeer* film or read the comics, you can probably imagine what a video game would look like: flying around in a jet pack, shooting gangsters and Nazis. Want to know how *The Rocketeer* on SNES starts out? With a bi-plane race. A very difficult bi-plane race that I could not beat no matter how hard I tried. Needless to say, I was disappointed and went back to playing *Super Mario World* pretty quickly.

It is only now through the power of the internet that I figured out how to win that frustrating race. The trick is to look at a tiny square at the bottom of the screen instead of your plane. How my young mind never figured that out is beyond me. After the race there is exactly one stage of what one would define as "Rocketeering," so it turns out I really wasn't missing much. – Blair Farrell

Rocko's Modern Life: Spunky's Dangerous Day

Publisher: Viacom New Media.
Developer: Viacom New Media.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer/ Adventure Puzzle, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Based on the Nickelodeon animated series *Rocko's Modern Life* (1993–1996), *Spunky's Dangerous Day* has players—as Rocko—working their way through four areas (comprised of sixteen stages): Sand in Your Navel (a beach), Trash-O-Madness (a junkyard), Ice Scream (the town), and Unbalanced Load (Laundry Land). Rocko walks, jumps, punches, and kicks, and his primary job is to escort his dog Spunky to the fire hydrant at the end of each area, keeping him safe from harm—meaning this platformer is riddled with puzzles.

To get Spunky through the game, you will perform such acts as feed him certain items, use a chair to catapult him in the air, toss him up to higher platforms, float him on a raft, pick him up and turn him in the other direction, move objects under him to break his fall, and protect him from crabs, pelicans, sea creatures, nuclear waste, pitfalls, and other enemies and obstacles. There are also switches and platforms to activate at certain times. The game looks enough like the cartoon, and there are cameos by such characters as Ed Bighead and Heffer Wolfe, but the music does not sound much like the show.

Memories: I prefer traditional platformers instead of games like this, where you have to walk along figuring out how to keep a tagalong character safe, so this game, which I find tedious, is not really my cup of Mountain Dew.

Notable Quotable:

"The sounds were exceptional with voices digitized as well. The challenge and difficulty was good, but they just weren't enough to get me to like it." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"You've probably never seen the cartoon, but *Rocko's Modern Life* is just as much fun whether you're a fan of the show or not. There's plenty of variety in the graphics and gameplay, and each level is hard enough to make you work without being stupidly difficult." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (May 1994)

Rocky Rodent

Publisher: Irem America.
Developer: Irem Software Engineering.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

The mob is in hot pursuit of Pie Face Balboa, owner of Rocky's favorite restaurant. While feasting one day, Rocky accidentally ate the mail that contained Pie's protection payment. In response to not being paid, mob boss Don Garcia kidnaps Pie's daughter, who also happens to be Pie's head chef at the restaurant. Feeling a little guilty and a whole lot hungry, Rocky promises to return her to safety.

At first glance, *Rocky Rodent* appears to be nothing more than another inferior *Sonic the Hedgehog* clone, and in some ways it is. Like *Sonic*, its lead character is a quick little animal with crazy hair and an attitude. And like *Sonic* and so many other games of its type, jumping on enemies is a common way to destroy them. Rocky's not as fast as Sonic, but he moves along pretty well.

While not exuding originality, *Rocky Rodent*, which has six multi-stage levels (apartments, sewers, towers, and the like), does have enough distinguishing characteristics and clever moments to give it its own identity. Rocky sports a variety of lethally charged hairstyles in his arsenal, including the basic hairdo, the spike, braids (similar to a grappling hook), a Mohawk (for throwing at enemies, or onto ledges to use as a trampoline), a spring, and a bird nest wig. Hair is not only used for thrashing an assortment of mobsters, rodents, and other enemies, but must also be wielded strategically to navigate otherwise unreachable areas, such as destroying certain blocks and jumping up to certain ledges. Further separating the game is a level that involves maneuvering atop speeding cars and trucks.

The colors are a tad washed-out at times, but the game looks pretty decent otherwise. Musically, *Rocky Rodent* is akin to a good cartoon (an atmosphere aided by text balloons during cutscenes), and the sound effects are quirky and playful. Called *Nitropunks: Mightheads* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

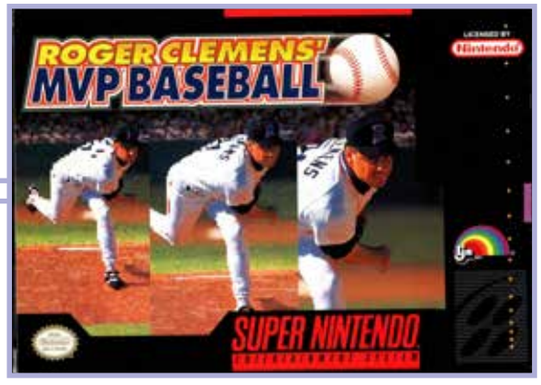
"It's a fun game to play but it's no *Sonic* or *Mario*." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Endearing as the character may be, Rocky Rodent won't be finding his way into my Super NES again. Whilst Irem have added some neat touches to Rocky's very basic platform antics, the dodgy sprite detection and overlong levels hardly inspire the player to progress through to the kidnapped girl. Admittedly, Rocky is a very polished game, and I particularly liked the carpet section where Rocky runs to avoid being dragged into a hole, and the assorted hairstyles are a novel slant on the power-up theme, but these features are no substitute for a lack of playability. Basically, playing *Rocky Rodent* is like buying a sandwich and finding only the front bit has got any filling—most annoying." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (1993)

Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



Like its NES progenitor, *Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball* for the SNES features an unusual viewpoint. Once the ball has been hit into play, the perspective changes to in the field, looking toward home plate. The batter/pitcher interfacing is more traditional, featuring a view from behind the catcher and windows showing runners on base. The game lacks MLB and MLBPA licensing, meaning player names (other than Clemens) are fake (if funny, such as Darryl Strawberry as "Raspberry"), as are team names (such as the San Francisco Quakes and the Texas Cowboys).

You can play an Exhibition match against the computer or a friend, or play Regular Season against the computer. In the Season option, you play three games against each team in your division. The National Division Season consists of thirty-three games, while the American Division Season comprises thirty-nine. If you qualify, you will advance to a best-of-seven playoff tournament, followed by a best-of-seven championship series. Other features include double plays, bunts, base stealing, diving and jumping for the ball, lead-offs, tagging, sliding, picking off runners on base, squeeze plays, the infield fly rule, pinch hitters, advice from Clemens (called "Rocket Talk"), and different types of pitches (curve ball, fast ball, change-up). The game leaves out two options found in the Genesis rendition: errors and a choice of control configuration. Also released for the Game Boy.

Fun Fact: Roger Clemens' advice screen in the NES version of the game is called "Ask the Rocket" (as opposed to "Rocket Talk").

Notable Quotable:
"A pretty good game with one major flaw—you can't get anybody out! Facing the computer is just one hit after another . . . The computer got at least three or four hits every single inning I played . . . Hitting and fielding are both pretty well done, and the game goes by fast." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"A flaw with the fielding is the slow speed of your throws. It seems to take forever for the ball to reach base when you're in the outfield, although you get used to it over time. Another problem unique to the Super Nintendo version is the awkward controls. To throw to first base you have to push right on the control pad. This is fine when you're looking toward the outfield, but this game has you playing behind the fielder! If not for the enjoyable arcade presentation and worthy opponent, this would be a near fatal flaw. As it stands, the game is a solid choice for those tired of traditional baseball offerings." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:
When I was younger, I was heavily into baseball. I was the starting center fielder for my team, and my dad was the coach. I was the only hardcore gamer on the squad, and when I became friends with the shortstop, I had little in common with him other than the fact that we played baseball and we liked the New York Yankees. Our families were close, though, and we would frequently go over to their house. In his bedroom he had a Super Nintendo. He didn't have many games, but he did have *Roger Clemens' MVP Baseball*.

After we would play our real game of baseball, if I went over to his house, this was the game we played—we liked that it was for two players and that we were at about the same skill level. I remember loving this game more than any other baseball title. I liked that you took control of every major function. However, it wasn't perfect. The field mechanics were rough, and it made it hard to judge the ball. I believe this was why the game was so competitive for us—there was absolutely no room for error, and we would have epic games against each other. Despite what any critic says about this game, I will always have fond memories of playing it with my friend and teammate. – Raymond Fix

Romance of the Three Kingdoms II

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–12 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1991.

Romance of the Three Kingdoms II is the sequel to *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (computers, NES), which first appeared as a 1985 Japanese computer game called *Sangokushi*. On a mission to unify ancient China, which is comprised of forty-one different provinces, you select from six scenarios: Dong Zhuo Seizes Loyang (189 A.D.), Rivals Struggle for Power (194 A.D.), Aged Liu Bei Hides (201 A.D.), Cao Cao Covets Control of China (208 A.D.), Nation Breaks into 3 Divisions (215 A.D.), and The Three-way Contest (220 A.D.).

As a leader from China's past—such as the noble Lui Bei or the merciless Cao Cao—you perform a variety of tasks, including invading enemy cities; negotiating truces; bribing rival officers; tricking rival rulers into fighting one another; discovering mystic relics that increase your power; setting fire to enemy units; appointing advisors and governors; teaming up to carry out joint invasions on mutual enemies; dealing with disasters (floods, rebellions, plagues, and the like); and much more. The intelligence, war ability, and charm of a warlord influences how successful he or she will be when performing certain tasks, such as dueling, or increasing land value in a province.

The game has more than 200 different characters, and players can create new rulers. The two main viewpoints are an overhead map (each province is color-coded for a particular ruler) and a game board/battlefield comprised of squares decorated by such terrain as rock, water, hills, grass, and trees. Also released for the NES and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"The game plays sort of like a mixture of *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Risk*, where you must position and build up your characters, with *Risk*-style battling. The graphics aren't much to write home about, but board game strategy fans will love it." – SNES Central (snescentral.com)

Notable Quotable:
"Very in-depth. Convoluted, even. This game came out before in-game tutorials were a thing, and even a glance at GameFAQs for some direction went over my head. And it's bonkers to see PC-style (Y/N) prompts in a Super Nintendo game . . . On the surface, it's a lot like Paradox Interactive's *Crusader Kings II*." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

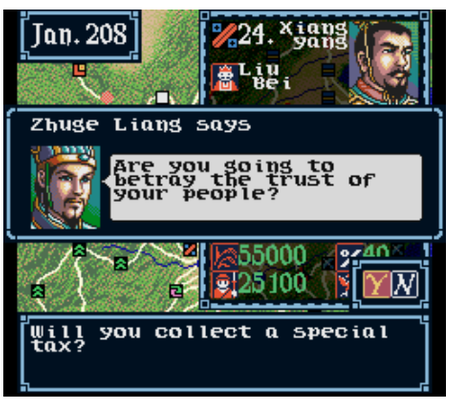
Notable Quotable:
"Several new additions are made to the sequel, including the ability to intercept enemy messengers, relying on advisers to predict the outcome of an action, and a reputation system which lowers if the player continues to do reprehensible things and may even convince allied officers to defect to the enemy." – Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

Romance of the Three Kingdoms III: Dragon of Destiny

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Taking place in second-century China after the fall of the Han Dynasty, *Dragon of Destiny* puts players in control of one of thirty-three different rulers (such as Cao Rui or Liu Chan), including six who are new to this game. The player's job is to occupy and reunite the country, which has forty-six provinces. Game scenarios include Dong Zhuo's Rivals Unite (189 A.D.), The Chaotic Era Begins (194 A.D.), Cao Cao's Power Expands (201 A.D.), Zhuge Liang Plots Strategy (208 A.D.), Liu Bei Builds Shu Kingdom (221 A.D.), and Three Kingdom Fights Decay (235 A.D.).

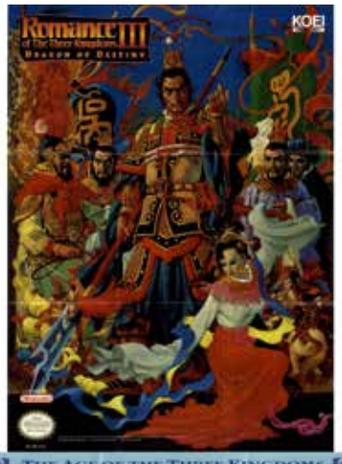
Gameplay consists of selecting commanders; drafting and hiring soldiers to fortify armies and navies; recruiting officers; negotiating truces; bribing rival officers; forcing rivals to fight one another; moving units across a battle map (there are seventeen different types of terrain); preparing for disasters (plagues, floods, revolts, and the like); improving agriculture; upgrading infrastructure; bartering with merchants; transferring gold and other goods; building galleys for naval battles; waging war on neutral ground; storming enemy castles; scorching enemy lands with fire attacks; launching attacks with cavalry, crossbow, and naval combat units; and much more. Includes more than 500 historical characters. Also released for the Genesis.



Notable Quotable:
"*Romance III* has great depth for fans of this type of strategy RPG . . . An awkward menu item selection process makes it difficult to play this game because there is no message telling you that a command has been accepted. You have to be a real strategy die-hard to master this interface." – *Nintendo Power* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"The joy of *RTK III* is about watching numbers grow (for example, at harvest time) and shrink (when you knock off enemy soldiers). If you have a mind for it, it's great fun. However, first-time Koei gamers should probably go for easier-to-digest SNES fare such as *Gemfire* or even *Genghis Khan II*. If you're already Koei crazy, you can't help yourself—you'll love *Romance*." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Games like this are the answer to a war gamer's prayer . . . Reading the rulebook is highly recommended . . . highly challenging and has an intricate command structure. The menus which allow the player to issue monthly civil and military orders are logical and easy to work . . . War games aren't noted for superb graphics, so *Romance III*'s colorful, atmospheric visuals are a pleasant surprise. The battle sequences, shown in modified overhead perspective, are an unexpected plus. The sound and music are decent, if not inspirational . . . shows that video games are more than just shooters and scrollers . . . brain-gamers should love it." – *Electronic Games* (February 1994)



Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV: Wall of Fire

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–8 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

Set during the late second and third centuries of ancient China (the Second Han Dynasty), this game is based on the historical novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* by Luo Guanzhong. China is on the verge of collapse. Court families are fighting amongst themselves, and powerful warlords dominate the landscape. As a ruler during this contentious time, you must unify China by claiming forty-three cities. You can play as one of thirty-eight rulers (eight of whom you can create yourself) and discuss war strategy with 558 different officers. Scenarios include Dong Zhuo Triumphs in Luo Yang (189 A.D.), Turmoil Spreads in China (194 A.D.), Cao Cao Expands His Domain (201 A.D.), Battle of Red Wall (208 A.D.), Birth of the Three Kingdoms (221 A.D.), and Clash of Wei, Wu, and Shu (235 A.D.).

The intricate action has you building weapons, drafting and training soldiers, carrying out diplomatic negotiations, searching for and recruiting officers, assigning officers to specific tasks, waging war, farming land, building dams, giving and receiving gold and provisions, bribing enemies to betray their ruler, adjusting cities' domestic policies, spying on other cities, swapping prisoners, considering advice from officers, committing arson, creating chaos to confuse enemies, increasing your cities' economic value and technology level, dealing with disastrous events (locust, plague, flood, typhoon), and much more. Gameplay is similar to previous titles in the series, but interfacing is smoother, the graphics are more detailed, and the lands are viewed from an isometric perspective. Plus there are new weapons, such as automatic firing crossbows, catapults, and battering rams. You can even challenge your enemies to a castle, open-plains, or river duel while riding a horse. A new "help" feature gives you important command information.

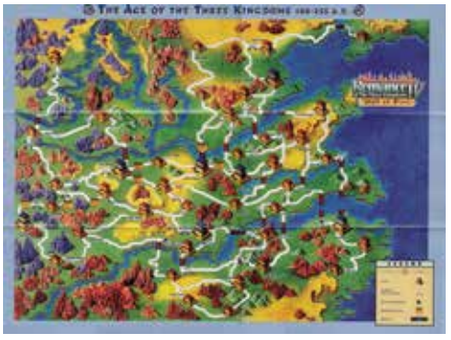
Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV: Wall of Fire was also released for the 3DO, Sega 32X, PlayStation, Saturn, and Dreamcast. The next game in the series, *Sangokushi V*, was only released overseas (for the Saturn, PSX, and PSP). Followed by *Romance of the Three Kingdoms VI: Awakening of the Dragon* (PSX), *Romance of the Three Kingdoms VII* (PS2), and other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"Watching numbers rise and fall really has to thrill you to enjoy any Koei game, but this time the enhanced graphics and smooth command interface seem to hide the number-crunching behind political intrigue and battle strategy. *Wall of Fire* adds spice to *Romance*." – *GamePro* (July 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Romance of the Three Kingdoms IV* is another example of exemplary gaming by the developers at Koei. Strategy fans should rejoice at the release of another of these titles. But, as I have said previously concerning Koei games, they sometimes drag a little and can become quite tedious to play. So don't bother getting this game unless you're interested in no-frills strategy where a smart diplomat can be just as important as a mighty warrior." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (August 1995)

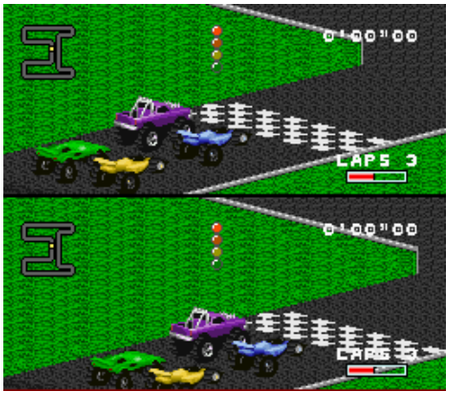


RPM Racing

Publisher: Interplay Productions.
Developer: Interplay Productions/ Silicon & Synapse.
Game Type: Demolition/Combat Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1991.

Also known as *Radical Psycho Machine Racing*, this game is similar to *R.C. Pro-Am* for the NES and *Rock N' Roll Racing* for the Genesis and SNES, complete with isometric perspective, but it is not as highly regarded as those two classics. You begin the game by selecting one of three vehicles: a monster truck, a sports car, or a formula car. Then you will race against three other vehicles (on straight, curvy, oval, and hilly tracks—more than 100 in all) to win money for upgrading your car's tires (better traction), engine (faster acceleration and higher top speed), armor (increases the amount of damage you can take), and shocks (recover better from driving over hills). You can also purchase oil for making other cars slip and slide, nitro for a speed boost, and mines for destroying other cars. You should be careful not to drive over a mine yourself or bump into walls.

You can drive a single race or a full season, and you can create and save your own tracks using a grid-based track editor. There are three types of track terrain—pavement, dirt, and ice—each of which affects your driving. The game offers a split-screen perspective, even when you are playing by yourself. Patterned after *Racing Destruction Set* for the Commodore 64, *RPM Racing* was the first game developed by Silicon & Synapse, which would become Blizzard Entertainment. It is one of the few games to use the Super Nintendo's high resolution graphics mode, meaning the graphics are sharp, but the color pallet is limited.



Notable Quotable:
"Put it all together and you've got a good attempt at an original racing game. The custom track options add to lastability, but ultimately there's not enough variety to make this a success." – *N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"While I give this game high marks for its original execution of the racing theme, it just doesn't have the play mechanics nor the visual pizzazz needed to make it a winner." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Graphically quite dull . . . repetitive scenery . . . sound effects decent enough . . . I didn't think the music was all that memorable . . . the gameplay is more than capable of keeping you entertained for several hours." – Drew Wilson (www.freezenet.ca)

R-Type III: The Third Lightning

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Irem.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1994.

The dark forces of the BYDO Empire—once thought destroyed—have returned, armed with more powerful weapons than ever. At the helm of the new R-90 ship, you are Earth's only hope to destroy them. As in the previous games in the *R-Type* series, the action moves to the right, with you shooting aliens (with beams and a detachable laser unit that also acts as a shield) while avoiding enemies, enemy fire, environmental walls, and terrain.

At the beginning of the game you select your Force Device weapon, which you can use after you collect color-coded laser unit power-ups. The original Force from previous games—now called the Round Force—features three types of lasers: chain, which transmits a circular pattern around your ship; mirror, which fires in three directions; and sweep, which runs over and around obstacles, seeking out enemies.

In addition to the Round Force, *R-Type III* introduces two new Force Devices. Shadow Force lasers include reverse, which fires laser beams behind you; shadow, an extra unit that appears and shoots your enemies; and strafe, which are beams that follow along terrain, wiping out enemies. Cyclone Force lasers include pierce, a beam that moves through objects; wave, which expands into a ring when it strikes an object; and capsule, which you will have to play the game to find out what it does (gotta have some surprises, right?).

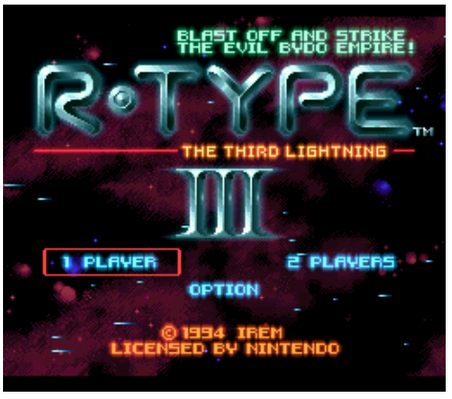
The aforementioned laser units sometimes appear when you destroy power armor. Other units released by power armor you destroy include speed (increase your ship's speed), pursuit (missiles that track down enemies and explode on contact), and pit (units that circle your ship, protecting it from enemy fire). There are also chargeable special weapons you can fire, including a super power beam and a hyper drive beam.

The six stages of action will take you through outer space, a gigantic creature, a vast cave-like machine (featuring diagonal and horizontal movement), a steel factory (with molten lava and walls that slam together), a bio lab filled with mutant creatures, and the Galaxy of the Abyss, where you will face the Mother BYDO. After you beat the game you are given access to an advanced mission that is more difficult.

Preceded by *R-Type* (various), *R-Type II* (various), *Super R-Type* (SNES), and *R-Type Leo* (arcade), *R-Type III: The Third Lightning* was also released for the Game Boy Advance. Followed by *R-Types* (PSX), *R-Type Delta* (PSX, PS3, PSP), *R-Type DX* (GBC), *R-Type Final* (PS2), *R-Type Command* (PSP), and *R-Type Dimensions* (PS3, Xbox 360).

Notable Quotable:

"Next to the sterling *Thunder Force 4*, this is the best side-scrolling shooter I've played in a long time. What happened to this great genre? I hope 32-bit brings the side-scrolling shooter back." – *GameFan* (December 1994)

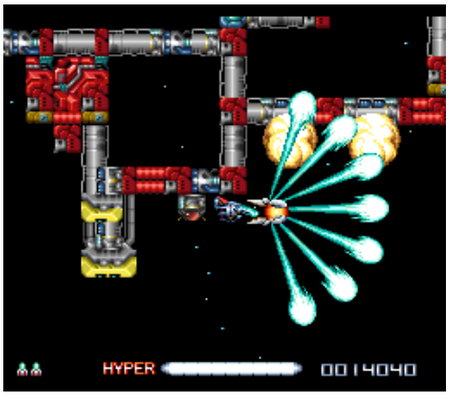


Notable Quotable:

"This is definitely one game you won't master in one sitting! Fans of the earlier installments in the *R-Type* saga will want to check this one out. Huge levels, excellent bosses (and a rather high difficulty) make this the shooter to get. The two-player is a nice option and thank goodness for the unlimited continues!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The attention to detail is mind-boggling for a 16-bit title, and as far as sprite-based gaming goes, it certainly surpasses early Sony PlayStation offerings such as *Raiden*. Vibrant colors, sharp mechanical and 'alien' renderings, and flicker-free sprites combine to make for a crisp, stylish visual experience. Mode 7 effects such as the rotating scaffolding and revolving barrel-like structure in the first level are the norm . . . Sound effects are solid, but the music is noteworthy and memorable . . . There is nothing like blaring, thrashing hard rock in a hard-as-hell shooter. The control is absolutely flawless, so that when you die it's your fault, and you'll know it. You'll respect the ingenuity that went into making the game corner you and force your hand. Because it is a pattern shooter, you cannot rely on extraordinary reflexes alone to blast through it from beginning to end. Positioning and knowledge of the enemy's weak points and using the right weapon for the right situation, as well as knowing where to position your device are the keys to victory here." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)



Insider Insight:

I bought a used copy of *R-Type III* from EB Games at the Galleria Mall in Buffalo, New York. It was one of the first times I was willing to buy a used game simply because new copies were priced at $70—much higher than a typical SNES game at the time. Why the higher price is still something I do not understand. The same pricing phenomenon also occurred with *R-Type* for the TurboGrafx, where it cost more than any other new title on that system.

Regardless of the price, *R-Type III* is truly a piece of art, with an amazing soundtrack, incredible graphics, near-perfect controls, great level design, and a nice variety of original enemies and bosses. It is also extremely difficult. After getting blown up 50+ times and starting the same level over and over again, you can really feel the adrenaline pumping as you try your best not to smash the SNES controller into a million pieces.

If the modern gaming term "rage quit" existed in the '90s, it would have been synonymous with *R-Type III*. This is hands-down one of the hardest, most punishing games ever created for the SNES. Yet it is a blast to play and kept pulling me back in, even though I knew I would never finish the game with my limited skill set.

I know when to walk away from a game that is unfairly balanced, but what separates *R-Type III* from that category is that it is truly fun. With enough skill you can get past the harder parts of the game. The desire to see more levels, experience more of the awesome soundtrack, and see more cool bosses keeps me coming back. Even so, at some point I had to decide to stop playing the game—otherwise I would likely need anger management therapy.

I traded in *R-Type III* out of spite after one particularly soul-crushing play session (I got all the way to level two this time), and it was one of the best decisions I have ever made. I felt like I had my life back and a huge monkey was lifted off my back. Not many games had that level of control over my life—the quest to see what the next level had in store was too much to handle.

R-Type III has the unique honor of being the only game I refuse to ever own again, simply because I do not need to lose any more of my life to this menace. Now I understand the higher price this game commanded, at least metaphorically—there was indeed a high price to be paid! – Russ Kumro

Run Saber

Publisher: Atlus Software.
Developer: Hori Electric.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Run Saber is somewhat similar to the more popular *Strider* (Genesis), but with the addition of cooperative play. Gamers guide one of two hacking, slashing, fast-action Run Saber cyborgs—Allen, who wields a Thunder Saber, or cyborg Sheena, who uses an Ice Saber—through five futuristic levels: Taj Base (a former defense base), Tong City (in the Orient), Jodvalley (the jungles of South America), Grey Fac (an old mining site), and Bruford (a hidden base). Each level has minor bosses—such as a pink mermaid, a mutant flamethrower, or a giant falcon—and a final boss, such as a fighter jet, a mutant dragon, or a giant mech. Standard enemies include spearmen, bird statues, skull masks, giant insects, living slime, security pods, alien scientists, and more.

Each Run Saber has a variety of moves, including jumping, drop-kicking, sliding left and right, swinging on vines, hanging onto and moving along the ceiling, and climbing up and down walls and cliff sides. By grabbing orb power-ups, each character can unleash a special lightning (Allen) or ice (Sheena) move that damages all on-screen enemies. Other power-ups include health, extra lives, and a bigger sword. According to the storyline, the action takes place in 2998, when Earth has become hopelessly polluted. Dr. Bruford has devised a plan to use radiation to clean up the planet, but something goes horribly wrong, and he is mutated into an evil being on a quest for world domination.

Notable Quotable:

"What *Run Saber* desperately wants to be is *Strider* . . . But while *Strider* is a fantastic game, with brilliant graphics and loads to do, *Run Saber* is firmly average. It's got one or two interesting ideas in it, but there's just not enough there to fire the imagination and keep it blazing. Despite some attractive backdrops here and there, the levels all seem really dull and bland, and the baddies just sort of walk or fly around the screen shooting at you. There's the odd boss that wobbles about in Mode 7, and a bizarre bit when you're running about on the top of a plane, but nothing that sticks in the mind. I quickly got bored." – *Super Play* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"If it weren't for the two-player aspect, *Run Saber* would fall into the generic action platform genre . . . However, anyone who has played it will tell you what a difference the multi-player mode makes . . . An obvious *Strider* knock-off. The stages are designed much like the classic action title from Capcom, with numerous angular sections that rarely stay on a flat path. Players can grasp onto just about every ceiling and wall . . . The sword is a powerful weapon and can be powered up once. The sprites are small, not particularly colorful, and detail is lacking . . . Whereas *Strider* offered a huge player sprite to work with, *Run Saber* allows for plenty of movement to avoid any attack. That's a necessity in a game where you're sometimes overwhelmed with firepower. It also makes the game too easy . . . Using a continue drops a player right at the spot they died, which cuts down on the repetition of repeating levels, but cuts the life span short . . . The final boss, taking up the entire screen, is a major task for a single player. With two hacking away side-by-side, it's a more enjoyable experience . . . The music is decent, level design about perfect (plenty of room to explore), graphics average, and the simple slashing/jumping gameplay is easily forgotten in a sea of games like this." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:

Sometimes, for one reason or another, your game system missed out on some popular titles. One of these for me was the arcade game *Strider*, and unfortunately it never came to the SNES. But soon after I got my Super Nintendo, I heard of a game that was similar to *Strider*. After I read about it in *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, I ran to get a copy of *Run Saber*. Upon playing the game, it became very clear that this was not *Strider*, other than a similar attack method. *Run Saber* was fun in its own right. Sporting a two-player co-op, it had me and my friends fighting all kinds of evil foes. Trust me—these are some of the craziest enemies I have ever encountered in a side-scroller. The first level has you on a fighter jet that is possessed by some sort of alien. It dives, climbs, and loops, trying to knock you off its fuselage. But once destroyed, your player jumps off anyway. – Stephen Smith

Samurai Shodown

Publisher: Takara.
Developer: Takara.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Samurai Shodown for the SNES features all twelve fighters from SNK's weapons-based (primarily swords) arcade game from 1993, including Earthquake, who is absent from the Genesis version. Despite the system's vaunted scaling capabilities, the camera does not zoom in and out on the action, making the characters appear small at all times. Thanks to the smaller characters slowdown is not a problem (as it is in the Genesis game). Due to Nintendo's policies regarding violent content the blood is orange, and fighters cannot slice each other in half.

In this game, you are a Samurai (circa near the end of the eighteenth century) taking on the toughest warriors in the world in a series of one-on-one fights. You can fight as any one of the twelve fighters: Ha-Oh Maru (Samurai with Nerves of Steel), Ukyo Tachibana (Samurai Hearthrob), Nakoruru (Defender of the Natural World), Charlotte (Revolutionary Leader), Galford (Ninja Golden Boy), Hanzo Hattori (Master of the Shadows—he looks like the protagonist in *Shinobi*), Jubei Yagyu (Secret Agent of the Japanese Empire), Kyoshiro Senryo (Showbiz Samurai), Wan Fu (Gargantuan Military Hero), Tam Tam (Mayan Avenger), Genan Shiranui (Scissor-Handed Slasher), and Earthquake (A Ton of Trouble From Texas).

Each character can do light, medium, and hard kick and slash attacks, each can jump and crouch, and each has two or three special moves, such as cyclone slash, shallow swipe, plasma blade, head strike, rush dog (Galford fights alongside a canine companion), flying spikeball, saber slash, and/or Confucius thunder bomb. A rage gauge gives you added attack power when you accumulate damage, and a courier man occasionally runs past, throwing you food, coins, and other items. In addition to the standard, best-two-out-of-three fights, there are bonus stages where you hack and slash dummies that appear from the top and bottom of the screen. *Samurai Shodown* was also released for the Sega CD, Game Gear, Game Boy, Neo Geo, and 3DO.

Notable Quotable:

"It's not quite in the same leagues as *MKII* or *SSFII*, but it's still a great game. If you're tired of hand-to-hand combat, by all means take the chance to pick up a sword and start hacking away." – *Game Players* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*Samurai Shodown* lacks the in-game scaling of the arcade and Neo Geo versions, but makes up for it with extremely detailed characters and the most beautifully animated backgrounds yet seen in a Super Nintendo fighting game . . . Most of the special attacks involve your character's sword, so you are at a real disadvantage should you lose it. That's right, you can lose your weapon! This can happen while fight-

Samurai Shodown

ing the opponent up close; if you rapidly tap the slash button while your swords are locked, you can flip the enemy's weapon away. You can still attack while you are weaponless, but it's important to retrieve it as soon as possible. On the flip side, whenever you knock the opponent's sword away you should prevent him or her from retrieving it . . . *Samurai Shodown* is a worthy game for fighting fanatics who long for some weapons-based combat as well as some blood to go along with their action . . . Considering the arcade game was several hundred megabits in size, this 32-Meg conversion is pretty impressive." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Shodown* SNES has its good points, but nothing can make up for the control and graphics problem. Not to mention the censored blood, fatalities and text. Don't walk into the *Shodown* showdown with this *Shodown*." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"A very earnest home version of the arcade smash that stays pretty faithful to the original material. Obviously, some will be disappointed because the scaling isn't in this version and the characters could be a little bigger. But for an adaptation of a Neo Geo title, this one does a very good job. The Timed Fight Mode is a good option." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Insider Insight:

The SNES was chock full of awesome 2D fighters. It seemed as though every fighting game you could possibly want, and a few you didn't, made their way to the system. Which was good, because in the 16-bit era you had a few groups: kids who had an SNES, Genesis, or Turbografx-16, and super-rich jerk kids who had all of those, plus a Neo Geo. At $600 for the system and $200 or more for the games, the Neo Geo never truly took off as a home console. Thankfully, many of their games got ported to other systems, and while they were not as sharp as their arcade counterparts, they were mostly pretty damn good.

My favorite among them was always *Samurai Shodown*. More than just a *Street Fighter II* clone, *Samurai Shodown* took the formula and added weapons, a feudal Japanese setting, and some really cool characters to make one excellent fighting game. Countless hours were spent on this title in my neighborhood. We would all get together—usually in a buddy's basement—and proceed to beat on each other. Not having to plunk down twenty-five cents every time was a huge plus. And while the memories are mostly fond, there were a few broken controllers as the result of someone's "cheese strategy."

Local versus matches are one of the things I miss dearly from this era of gaming. That feeling of being unbeatable for a time was incredible. It became as much about playing the player as playing the game. I will always have a deep-rooted love for fighters, and *Samurai Shodown* is one of the main reasons why. – Dan Ryan

Saturday Night Slam Masters

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Sports/Wrestling, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Saturday Night Slam Masters is fun, arcade-style action all the way, incorporating *Street Fighter II*-type visuals and such fighting moves as cyclone kicks, sonic fists, and a special tsunami attack into the wrestling formula. The view is from the side, and the screen scrolls a bit to show the entire playfield, with a highly animated crowd looking on. Fights oftentimes spill outside the ring, where bottles, tables, and chairs come into play.

There are eight large wrestlers from which to choose, each with character-specific attacks, such as Mike Haggar's (the character from *Final Fight*) spinning piledriver, King Rasta Mon's (a savage beast accompanied by a monkey) dreadlock drop, and El Stingray's (a Mexican luchador) jalapeño comet. Wrestlers—which also include Biff Slamkovich (Russian martial artist), Gunloc (street fighter from the slums), The Great Oni (Japanese wrestler with Kabuki makeup), Alexander the Grater (modeled after pro wrestler Big Van Vader), and Titanic Tim (who performs a neck chokehold)—can also run, jump, grapple, strike, climb turnbuckles, and do ground and flying attacks.

The Genesis cartridge lacks the four-player Battle Royal mode (featuring ten selectable wrestlers, including bosses Scorpion and Jumbo Jack) found in Capcom's 1993 arcade original, meaning the Super NES game is the better, more faithful of the two ports. The Genesis game does have an exclusive Death Match mode in which barbed wire ropes, weaponry, and exploding mines make the ring an especially treacherous fighting environment. Also, the Genesis version lets you select Scorpion and Jumbo Jack during the Single Battle mode—something you can't do in the SNES game. Known in Japan as *Muscle Bomber: The Body Explosion*.

Fun Fact: *Saturday Night Slam Masters* features character designs by artist Tetsuo Hara, best known for drawing the manga series *Fist of the North Star*.

Notable Quotable:

"While this has been tailored so it vaguely resembles pro wrestling, the fighting is closer to *Street Fighter*, with wild, unrealistic attacks—many of which share the same button combinations as *SF* moves. The two- and four-player vs. modes have you bouncing off the ropes for hours." – *Game Players* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"As gamers gear up for the home version of *Super Street Fighter II*, Capcom attempts to tide them over with *Saturday Night Slam Masters*, a wrestling game that, for all practical purposes, should have been titled 'Street Fighter II & ½.' Luckily, this game has more going for it than just a famous association; it's a solid grapplefest in its own right." – *FLUX* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"For wrestling that's fun, you really can't beat *Slam Masters*. It's a great translation from the arcade and in many ways, like control, it's very much improved. There aren't a whole lot of special moves, but hey, this isn't exactly *Street Fighter II* here. This game is an absolute riot with four players! As it stands, this game is fun for parties and gatherings, but it's not one I'd want to sit down and play all day." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Insider Insight:
During the height of the popularity of fighting games, many titles focused on using special moves and complex button presses. For that reason I was really interested in *Saturday Night Slam Masters*. Plus, Mike Haggar—a fighter from *Final Fight* and mayor of Metro City—is in the game, which is amazingly fun and challenging, though the animation is stiff and limited. But the controls are spot-on. Also, the game offers a tag team mode for co-op with friends. All the fighters look great, with some bearing an uncanny resemblance to later Street Fighters (i.e., Biff Slamkovich looks a lot like Alex from *Street Fighter III*). What made this game so special to me was that I got it from an SPCA rummage sale—a real diamond in the rough. So my money went to a good cause and I got *Saturday Night Slam Masters*. I am sure Mike Haggar would be proud. – Stephen Smith

Scooby-Doo Mystery

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment/ Sunsoft.
Developer: Argonaut Software.
Game Type: Mystery Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Much different than the Genesis game of the same name, *Scooby-Doo Mystery* for the SNES has players guiding Shaggy and Scooby (in tandem) through four areas: Ghost Ship, Fun Fair, Spooky Swamp, and Bradshaw Manor. In each location, the duo must walk around searching for clues—some exposed, some hidden—to solve the mystery. When you hold down X Scooby sniffs the floor for clues.

The other members of the Scooby Gang help you solve mysteries. Velma identifies the objects given to her. When you give her a clue she will tell you what it is and keep it, and when you give her all the clues she will solve the mystery. Daphne dishes out Scooby Snacks, which reduce the amount of fright on the fightometer, making Shaggy and Scooby brave enough to face their foes, including such scary creatures as ghosts, clowns, vampires, and pirates.

After you solve a mystery you must find Freddy, so he can show you the blueprint of the trap. Said blueprint details the various objects necessary to build the trap. You must then find all the trap objects and give them to Freddy, who will construct the trap. To defeat a villain, you must lead him to the trap. The game has action elements, such as running away from and throwing items at enemies, but this is an adventure game, not a platformer.

Bonus games, which appear at various points throughout, include Wac-A-Monster, where Shaggy must hit as many ghosts and ghouls as possible as they pop up from vases; and Scooby Sandwich Specials, where Scooby must catch items thrown by Shaggy and stack them on his sandwich pile. Success at the bonus games grants Scooby Snacks and extra lives. *Scooby-Doo Mystery* looks, plays, and sounds a lot like an episode of the cartoon, making it a nice (if somewhat tedious) game for fans of the famous franchise.

Notable Quotable:
"Reading maps and piecing together puzzles may not fulfill the action quota, but *Scooby-Doo* does provide an intriguing adventure for kids." *GamePro* (January 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are cartoon quality, with excellent music lifted straight from the TV show. Not only are the controls responsive, but the interface for interacting with characters is also well-designed. I do have a few minor complaints. First, touching certain objects like rats will drain your life, but since Scooby and Shaggy don't react at all, you don't even realize you're losing health. Next, at the beginning of the second mystery I became very stuck, and that was no fun at all! Finally, since the mysteries always play the same, I suspect the game's replay value is pretty modest. At least a password feature is included so you don't have to replay old mysteries. All in all, *Scooby-Doo Mystery* is a quality title that does a fine job of weaving a story into an entertaining game." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
What kid from the '70s doesn't love a Scooby-Doo mystery? I did, and I enjoyed this Super Nintendo game too. Argonaut Software did an amazing job making the game authentic. The look and feel of the television show was captured so well that my childhood dream of becoming a member of the "Scooby Gang" was almost realized!

All four mysteries in the game are enjoyable, but you will have to play it for yourself to find out if Count Bagosi is really an evil vampire or just an ordinary man trying to cover up his illegal counterfeiting operation. If it is the latter, then the count would have gotten away with it, too, "if it weren't for those meddling kids!" – Michael Thomasson

seaQuest DSV

Publisher: Malibu Games.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Naval Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Based on the NBC television series starring Roy Scheider that ran from 1993–1996 (the show was renamed *seaQuest 2032* for season three), *seaQuest DSV* puts players at the helm of the titular submarine, cruising in all directions around isometric/overhead view areas, avoiding obstacles and sea life while firing lasers, missiles, and torpedoes at enemy vessels. (Picture a water-based *Desert Strike*.) Players will also commandeer the crab (mining and recovery vehicle with manipulator arms), the stinger (one-person attack sub), the sea speeder (heavily armored transport vehicle), and the sea truck (multi-purpose transport for people, equipment, and supplies), along with directing the movements of a hyper-reality probe and Darwin the dolphin. Darwin—a character from the TV show—is highly intelligent and capable of swimming in strong currents and activating switches.

Missions—which are timed and require that players select the best vehicle for the task—include conducting rescues, disarming security systems, recovering sunken treasure and plane wreckage, defusing bombs, locating and destroying power relays, repairing a nuclear reactor, disposing of toxic waste, rebuilding a life support system, and more. Unlike so many games that are based on popular movies or TV shows, *seaQuest DSV* is not a hastily slapped together, barely recognizable shadow of its former self. Rather, it offers a nice mix of strategy and action while staying true to the spirit of the IP. *seaQuest DSV* for the SNES is similar to the Genesis rendition, but the Game Boy game has different missions and scrolls horizontally.

Notable Quotable:

"A godsend for fans of the show, but it'll have to work really hard to get some crossover appeal going on. Not a bad game by any means, just a bit tedious at times, but cool graphics don't make up for boredom." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

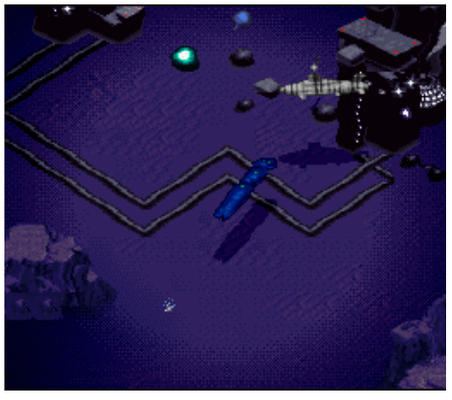
Notable Quotable:

"As much as the TV-derived *seaQuest DSV* benefits from the absence of Roy Scheider and Jonathan Brandis, it's still waterlogged, slow-mo action in which you pilot what appears to be a giant Bic pen through visually interesting but non-perilous undersea perils. The key difference between the Steven Spielberg-produced series and the game: You can watch the show for free but you've got to shell out about 65 bucks for the cartridge." – *Entertainment Weekly* (May 26, 1995)

Insider Insight:

I was a wee lad when *Jaws* hit movie theaters. Its impact changed the beach scene forever, and made a big impression on me as well. When its star, Roy Scheider, was cast to play the leading role in the 1993 nautical science fiction television series *seaQuest DSV*, I tuned in every week to see what adventures Captain Nathan Bridger and his crew would encounter.

The SNES game did not disappoint, as I was commanding miniature submersibles as well as the seaQuest herself! I was pleasantly surprised at being able to play as the trained bottlenose dolphin, Darwin. Each mission was different, offering a variety of gameplay mechanics. The game was far from brilliant, but it was one of those odd and unique titles that proved fascinating to play despite its failures. – Michael Thomasson



Secret of Evermore

Publisher: Square Soft.
Developer: Square Soft.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Secret of Evermore has players guiding a brave boy and his shape-changing dog through the fantasy world of Evermore, comprised of prehistoric jungles, ancient civilizations, medieval kingdoms, and futuristic cities. The utopian world was created by Professor Sidney Ruffleberg, but sinister forces turned it into a living nightmare.

You control the boy from a top-down perspective as he explores Evermore and battles such enemies as evil robots, wild animals (including dinosaurs), man-eating plants, and scary monsters. You begin with a bone-crusher sword, and during your travels you can collect other types of swords, along with various axes, spears, and bazookas. When you confront an enemy, press B to attack. If your power meter is not fully recharged when you attack again, you will unleash a weak attack. Only when the meter has charged 100% will you attack with full power.

You can also use magic, which employs an unusual alchemical technique involving the combination of ingredients such as water, oil, wax, crystal, acorn, feather, and dry ice to form spells such as levitate for lifting heavy objects, speed for raising agility, escape for escaping interior mazes, lightning storm for raining down lightning on enemies, drain for stealing hit points from enemies, and lance, which is a sharp projectile. Certain ingredients can only be found by using the dog's powerful sniffer. The dog also helps out with combat by unleashing vicious attacks. You can switch between the characters by pressing Select.

After completing certain tasks you can call on the magical powers of the leaders of Evermore, such as fireballs, heat waves, shock waves, electra-bolts, and restore, bringing both heroes to maximum hit points. Other activities in the game include gathering clues from townsfolk, purchasing items at stores, resting at inns to restore hit points, cutting through underbrush with your weapons, and using alchemy to get past rocks and chasms. You spend most of the game on foot, but can also use teleporters, a futuristic shuttle craft, and a flying windwalker. *Secret of Evermore* is a follow-up (but not a sequel) to *Secret of Mana*.

Notable Quotable:

"Square Soft has done it again! *Secret of Evermore*, the first RPG done by Square of America, has many similarities to past Square RPGs. The interface is quite similar to that of *Secret of Mana*, including the Ring Menu. The difficulty has been increased quite a bit since its last RPG release, *Chrono Trigger*, which makes the game that much better. With a new look and increased difficulty, *Secret of Evermore* will please most RPGers." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Classic films are often easy to appreciate as a product of their time, but they don't always age well. The same is true with *Secret of Evermore*. For all of its cool ideas, the end product is somewhat underwhelming when you look beyond the core elements. On the other hand, I've always had trouble getting into *Secret of Mana*, but *Evermore* immediately proved enjoy-

able . . . *Secret of Evermore* is definitely worth playing as long as you're not expecting the next *Chrono Trigger*. Given that the game is only remembered by a small fan base and is chock full of references to fake B-movies, it doubly deserves to be called a 'cult classic.'" – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"It was my first job in the industry, and to get dropped into a major new foray by one of the world's best RPG developers was a real lucky break for me. Since we built the team, the tools, and the game from the ground up, in unfamiliar territory, it was kind of like being a pioneer in a big new world. It was scary, but we sure learned a lot . . . We spent a lot of time on data compression . . . We had different ways of compressing nearly everything: maps, map tiles, sprite tiles, scripts, dialogue, etc. Some of them had to be decompressed very, very quickly, every frame. That was a real challenge . . . An RPG is inherently a tricky thing, and the SNES is a wacky piece of hardware; everything we did was kind of tricky in its own way." – *Secret of Evermore* lead programmer Brian Fehdrau (www.nintendolife.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are great. Your character movements are quick and crisp, and you can even dash . . . *Evermore* uses a ring system menu that *Secret of Mana* invented. This is a handy way of controlling things . . . A lot more laid back than most RPGs of the time. The dialogue is clever and sounds like a competent English speaker wrote the lines. There are some pretty funny moments, like the scene where you're forced to become a gladiator. The announcer of the competition calls you a 'loser with a stick,' and the audience throws fruit at you . . . Level crunching is as slow as molasses . . . The bosses are big and strong and powerful and mighty . . . *Secret of Evermore* is a very good game. Is it better than *Secret of Mana*? That's a matter of opinion. I personally enjoyed *Evermore* more because of the funny dialogue and richer graphics, but some people might prefer *Mana* because it has more playable characters and a more traditional magic system." – SNESMan16 (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

Nostalgia and memories can be interesting things. I had originally submitted my anecdote to Brett for the *SNES Omnibus* about my fond memories of *Secret of Evermore* that I had with my brother. I spoke about growing up with a sibling, and how important it was to find fun games to play together. Of course the SNES had plenty of options, but the true problem in my case was the fact that I loved 16-bit JRPGs, and they were just not co-op friendly for the most part. The US release for *Final Fantasy III* had a very limited co-op mode, where a second player could control characters during battle. Then there was another game—one of the system greats, *Secret of Mana*—which had a unique voluntary co-op system.

Around this time we were actively renting *Secret of Mana* and *Secret of Evermore*—both Square Soft classics and two of the best games on the system. For twenty years I had believed my brother and I played both games cooperatively, but once Brett followed up with me, I had a shocking revelation and an embarrassing discovery. Despite the fact that I revisit *Secret of Evermore* every few years, I have not had the opportunity to attempt to play co-op, and if you know where I am going with this that's for the best, because *Secret of Evermore* never had co-op!

For years I had these memories which turned out to be not true at all! Somehow I must have combined our time playing *Secret of Evermore* with *Secret of Mana*. Regardless, though, even if I never played the game through with my brother, we must have spent our time playing the original co-op method—passing the controller back and forth—and what better way to work together with a sibling than to share your time with such an incredibly underrated gem. Mechanically the same as its counterpart, this US exclusive took a darker tone and started out in a modern setting (unheard of in a JRPG at the time), with some unique time-travelling elements to make for another one of my favorite entries for one of the best gaming platforms of all time! – Joshua L. Olson

Secret of Mana

Publisher: Square Soft.
Developer: Square Soft.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

The tree of Mana keeps the forces of good and evil in perfect balance throughout the universe. Unfortunately, a magic sword tricks a young boy warrior into upsetting said balance, spreading evil throughout the land. As this warrior, you must restore harmony by going on a dangerous journey through dark caverns, scary castles, deep waters, and haunted forests (viewed from a top-down perspective) to retrieve the hidden seeds of the Mana tree. You spend most of your time on foot, but at times can travel on the back of a dinosaur, soar through the air like a cannonball, or get sent instantly from one place to another.

There are three characters in your party, each with individual strengths and weaknesses. The boy can't use magic, but he is good at fighting and can master weapons quickly. The Sprite—which you find in the Dwarf cave—is aggressive and excels at casting magic spells. The girl, who has average combat abilities, functions as a healer, enhancing the other heroes' abilities and curing them of injuries. Experience points are gained through battle, letting characters level-up their stats. Options, such as casting spells, selecting weapons, and using items, are done by cycling through a Ring Menu, a circular menu that appears over the party member you are controlling.

The game features numerous types of magic obtained by finding Elementals. The Sprite can cast such spells as gem missile, freeze, acid storm, fireball, lava wave, and thunderbolt, while the girl can unleash ice saber, flame saber, blaze wall, fire bouquet, lucid barrier, and lucent beam. There are eight types of weapons, each with eight levels: swords, gloves, axes, pole arms, whips, bows and arrows, boomerangs, and darts. There are many types of armor as well, along with such helpful items as candy (restores hit points), faerie walnuts (restores magic points), magic rope (returns you to the beginning of the area), and a moogle belt (returns you and your party to normal if you have been moogled by an enemy).

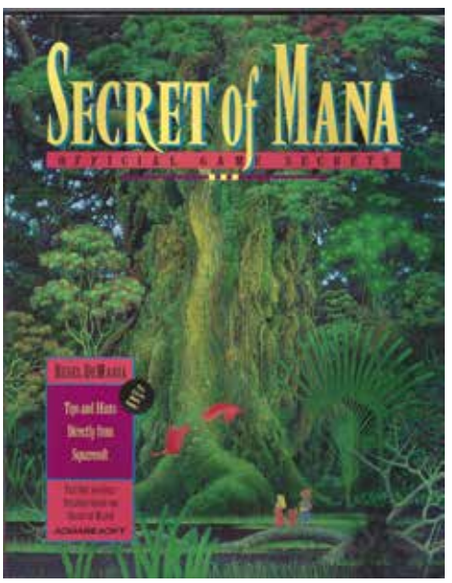
As with *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*, battles are in real time. In addition to fighting monsters (including bosses), you will talk to townspeople and soldiers, mow down bushes and tall grass, open treasure chests (beware, some chests contain traps), strike skulls to trigger switches, shatter boulders, chop down stalactites, swing a whip at poles to cross ravines, bounce on high steppers up to higher areas, cast spells on crystal orbs to activate magical switches, and much more.

Created by Square—the company responsible for the popular Final Fantasy series—*Secret of Mana* is a favorite among RPG fans. It is the sequel to *Seiken Densetsu*, which was released in North America as *Final Fantasy Adventure* (Game Boy) and in Europe as *Mystic Quest*. *Secret of Mana* was released in Japan as *Seiken Densetsu 2*.

Notable Quotable:
"Fighting allowed you to level-up characters, spells, and weapons. A cannon service and a *Never Ending Story*-esque dragon provided snazzy Mode 7 transportation. Aside from the *Zelda* series, there may not be a finer example of action/role-playing games out there." – *Game Informer Magazine* (January 2002)

Notable Quotable:
"This is one of the very best role-playing games available for the Super Nintendo. It has flaws, but I feel they are minor. The game's play and rules don't fit together as seamlessly as *Zelda*, the standard for cartridge-based systems, but on the other hand *Mana* was a much larger game than *Zelda*, with many more types of monsters, character options, and fortresses to explore." – *Dragon* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"It's got mystique, the cutest graphics you've ever seen, a soundtrack that sends a tingle right through your body, and playability to die for . . . A game made in heaven . . . I can tell you all about the great three-player option, the hilarious sense of humor accompanying the action-packed battle sequences, and the huge amount of weapons, spells and magical items you'll need to discover, but why spoil the adventure of a lifetime?" – *SNES Force* (January 1994)



Insider Insight:
While writing the strategy guide for *Secret of Mana*, I played through the game at least four times in short succession and never got tired of it. One of those times my wife—not normally a game player—joined me all the way through. I particularly enjoyed the team feel of the game, which worked well in single player, or when playing with someone else. It was imaginative and original, and when I found out years later that it was the great Nasir Gebelli who wrote it, somehow it made perfect sense. Nasir was one of those special designers who had already made a big impression on me with his earlier work.

Secret of Mana was different from many of the RPGs of the time in that it was an active, real-time game that involved not only live battles, but various tricks, traps, jumps, and intelligent use of gear. The game, like all RPGs, was a story, but *Secret of Mana* had a story that was ultimately uplifting. For that reason, when I wrote the Prima strategy guide I wrote it like a story—almost a fairy tale. I was always experimenting with different approaches to strategy guides, and this one was an experiment in style. It was also a lot of fun to write, and one of the guides I am most proud of. – Rusel DeMaria

Insider Insight:
It snowed for two straight weeks. Storms cancelled the last day of classes before Christmas and howled through New Year. We would go to bed, exhausted from sledding and snowballs, and wake to find our footprints filled, our snowmen made fatter. An ice-age glacier ironed Northern Ohio flat. Without hills or valleys, even a slight breeze could pile five-foot snowdrifts across fields and roads. Snowdrifts meant closed schools. In 1994, one week of Christmas vacation snowed itself into two. It was almost the best Christmas present a kid could ask for.

I say "almost" because my neighbor Jon unwrapped *The Secret of Mana* that Christmas. Today we would call *Mana* a three-player action-RPG. For two snowed-in weeks, Jon, Laura, and I called it perfection.

We lived in a rural subdivision, a half-mile "U" carved from soy and corn. My house at the bottom, with Jon's and Laura's on opposing legs; the walk between houses took minutes at most. The lure of a *Super Mario 3* or a *Star Fox*, though, made the trip near-instantaneous.

I suspect I warped to Jon's house—like most Christmases—to deliver a tray of mom's cookies. I don't know; maybe Jon simply called me over. Either way, I probably removed my snow boots, turned right from their entry, and walked the L-shaped hall to Jon's room.

Jon, Laura, and I would play video games until Jon's mother shooed us into the sunshine. It being Jon's house, Jon's *Secret of Mana* cart, Jon's four-player Super Multitap, and Jon's controllers, he claimed rights to the game's spiky-haired hero. Given the choice to rename the hero, we dubbed him "Dude." The spell casting sprite we called "Rad." The girl character we named, rather uncreatively, "Girl." (That I remember these names, given as an afterthought over twenty years ago, both amazes and confounds me.)

We were twelve, entering the awkward space between childhood and something else. Laura, we realized, was not just Laura, our neighbor, but Laura—a Girl. Against her protestations the girl character lacked physical strength and offensive magic—Jon and I voted that Laura—a girl—must play "Girl."

Had *Secret of Mana* been a record, one could say we played its grooves flat. I remember the three of us in Jon's room, battling "rabites" and wasps and giant monsters for two weeks straight, only breaking for food and, occasionally, sledding. The part of *Mana*'s plot revolving around saving Santa Claus seemed all the more fitting.

Jon's mother worked as an administrator with the city schools; she knew well before the TV and radio stations if school would be cancelled. Some evenings, the sun a twinkle on the darkening horizon, she would pop her head into Jon's room. "School's cancelled again tomorrow." Sweeter words were never spoken. Laura and I would call home and have our curfews pushed back.

A weekend thaw eventually melted our perpetual holiday. The three of us sat on a bright Sunday afternoon, at last watching the Mana Beast dissolve into pixels before our might. The feeling was equal parts satisfaction and regret. After weeks of work we had saved the world, but it was over. Our saving the world had irrevocably changed it. At twelve, we saw the looming edge of our friendship. Different schools, new circles—we drifted apart. It happens. It's growing up.

Every time I sit down with a game, I am searching for *Mana*. I want to be swallowed, body and soul. *Mother 3* came close. But Shigesato Itoi's masterpiece is single-player—engrossing but unshared.

Ohio winter looms as I write this. Shorter days are ushering frosted nights. Maybe this Christmas will see another week of snows. Maybe my own children—almost as old as I was then, old enough to slash rabites with the best of them—will get some extra time away from school. Maybe the three of us will sit down in our basement, warmed by blankets and cocoa. Maybe, at long last, I will again find the *Secret of Mana*. – Keith Good

Shadowrun

Publisher: Data East.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Based on FASA's tabletop RPG, *Shadowrun* is a cyberpunk thriller that puts players in the role of Jake Armatage, an amnesia victim searching for the man trying to kill him. The storyline is loosely based on Robert N. Charrette's *Shadowrun* novel *Never Deal with a Dragon* (1990), and the action is set in futuristic Seattle (circa 2050, on an isometric playfield), where cyborgs coexist with such fantasy creatures as elves, orcs, vampires, and trolls.

Battles take place in real time and are waged by guiding a targeting cursor around the screen, using a pistol, a shotgun, and the like to shoot enemies. In addition, Jake must talk to people, use magic, solve puzzles, examine items, use key cards to open doors, break into computer databases, and use karma to increase his attributes, skills, and magic levels. For some of these actions you guide a hand around the screen.

You should be careful to avoid shooting innocents or you will lose karma, but you can take money from the bad guys you kill. This money, which can also be gained by accessing computer accounts, is used for purchasing items, upgrading firearms, and hiring thugs to assist with combat. Unlike most console RPGs of the era, *Shadowrun* is dark and violent. The game is much different than the Sega Genesis cart of the same name.

Fun Fact: In 2013, Harebrained Schemes completed a successful Kickstarter campaign for *Shadowrun Returns*, a computer and iOS title. It was designed by Jordan Weisman, the creator of the original *Shadowrun* tabletop role-playing game. It includes a mission that ties together the storylines of the SNES and Genesis carts.

Notable Quotable:

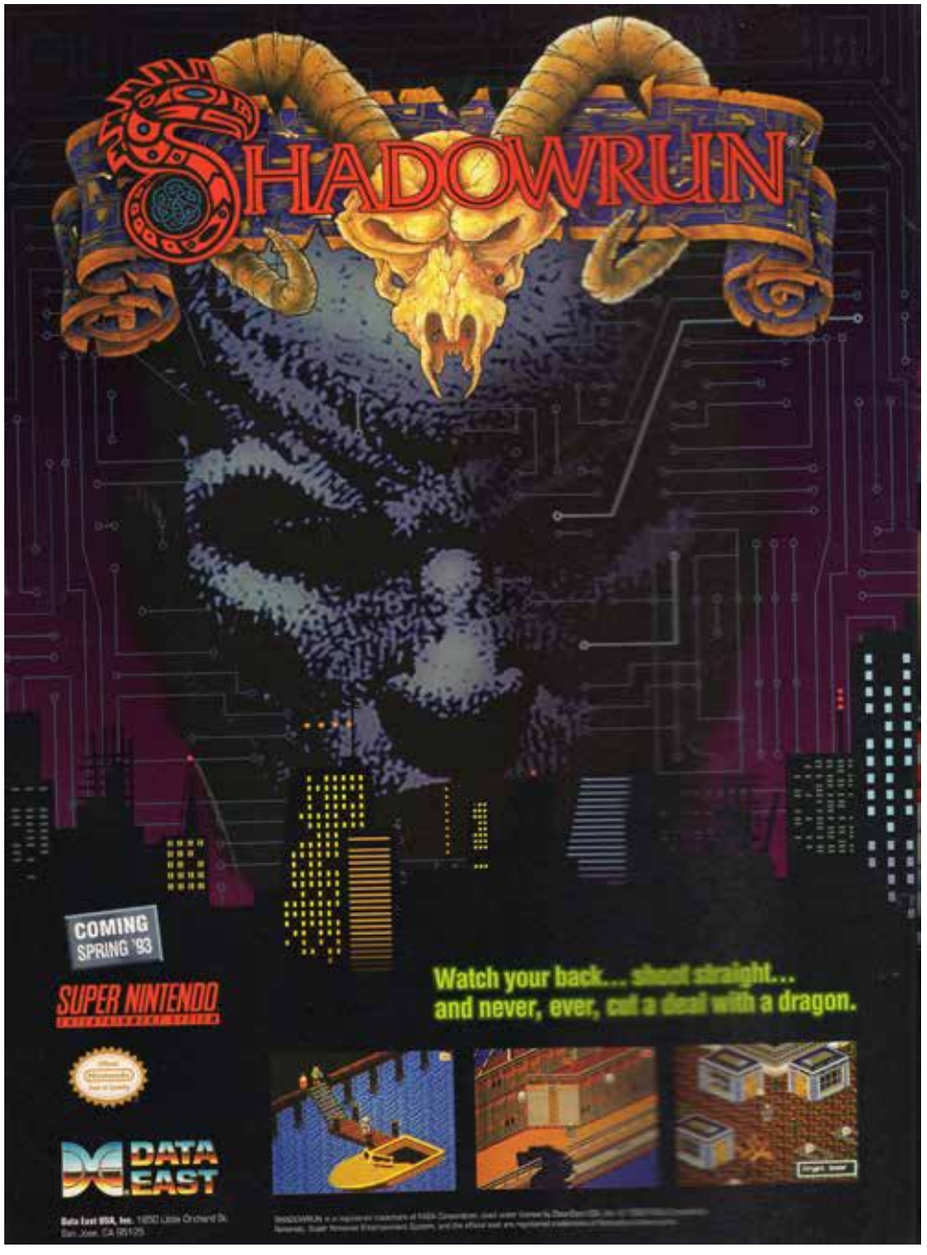
"*Shadowrun* is an open-ended game of discovery. The atmosphere and plot are like the cinematic sci-fi of *Blade Runner* and the oppressive future-vision of *1984*. It's inspiring, full of moody visuals and imaginative puzzles. The programmers have seen the need to strike a balance between reflex-dependent arcade action and adventure game logic. One moment you'll be exchanging gunfire with a sniper; the next you'll be wracking your brains over a carefully placed, thoughtfully devised situational problem." – *Super Play* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"This game isn't pretty. The characters, backgrounds, and the few short 'movies' are all horribly pixilated. The dark mood of the game is expressed in the dismal colors . . . The musical score consists of hollow attempts at cool music in the early '90s. The quality is gritty, the songs are all similarly weak, and halfway through the game I hit the mute button for the sake of all those innocent bystanders in my house. The sound effects are equally weak . . . The story is probably the one saving grace . . . It borrowed heavily from *Total Recall*, but added many bizarre new twists. Talking animals, magic spells, and several allies for hire make the story interesting enough to let you ignore the cheesy gameplay and music." – RPGFan (www.rpgfan.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The biggest drawback to the game is one that is characteristic of nearly all adventure games on the PC: once you finish the game, you'll know exactly where everything is and how to solve all of the puzzles. Thus, the replay value is diminished because all of the fun is unraveling the story the first time you play it. Another minor stumbling block is that *Shadowrun* has a lot of tricky combat scenes that would probably be better suited to a turn-based system instead of real time; the computer immediately opens fire while you have to first move a targeting cursor before firing your weapon. You learn to adjust, but it's very hard to avoid taking several hits the moment you enter a room or dangerous area . . . *Shadowrun* is a worthwhile game for fans of adventure games who like a little role-playing thrown in for good measure. The setting and real-time combat may not be for all tastes, but there are not many games on the system offering such a wonderfully moody atmosphere." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)



Insider Insight:

I never knew what cyberpunk was until I was introduced to *Shadowrun*. This was a recommendation by my sister's fiancé, who was a fan of the books and had purchased the game as soon as it came out. I remember watching him play and being mesmerized by the isometric style and the more story-driven nature of the game. RPGs were a genre I was familiar with, and I was used to seeing lengthy and detailed stories.

The use of questioning people and learning keywords to progress through the story gave me a sense of mystery I had never felt in a game before, and the atmosphere was dark and brooding. For a game on a Nintendo console this was almost unheard of. It blew my mind to see something so dark on the system that gave us friendly, happy games like *Super Mario World* and *Kirby*. I was glued to the TV as though watching a movie, anxiously waiting for what would happen on the next screen.

I eagerly anticipated the moment where I could ask to borrow the game and play it myself. I had to wait a long time, since the game only had two saves and my brother took the second slot. Rather than save over their data, I ended up waiting a few years until I could pick up a copy of my own. My brother had picked up the Sega Genesis game, but it was not the same—it lacked the finesse and art of the Super Nintendo version.

From the still images of the characters you spoke to, to the questions uncovering new truths to ask about, *Shadowrun* was a unique game for the SNES. It gave me a new perspective of what the 16-bit generation could do. – Zoe K. Howard

Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye

Publisher: Activision.
Developer: HOT-B USA.
Game Type: Tile Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Based on the ancient Chinese game mahjong, *Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye* is simple to play, yet deviously difficult to beat. The objective is to remove all the tiles from a pyramid (viewed from overhead), two tiles at a time. Each tile in the pyramid has a match. To remove a pair of tiles, players must select a tile along with its match, but only tiles that are "free" can be selected. A free tile is one that has nothing on top of it and is open to the left or right.

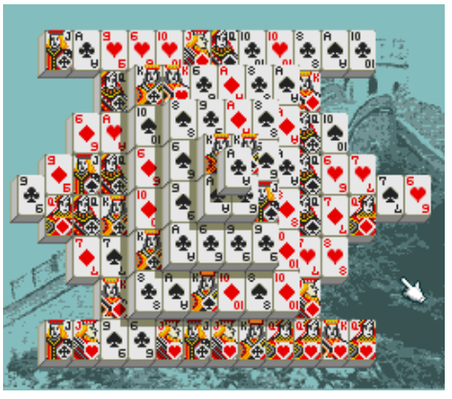
The game ends when the player has removed all the tiles, or when the player can no longer make any legal moves (removing the wrong two tiles leaves no matching pairs). There are thirteen different layout types (Shanghai, plus the animals of the zodiac) and eight different tile designs, including alphabet, animals, flag, and sports. The sequel to *Shanghai* (computers, various), *Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye* adds a special two-player Dragon's Eye mode, in which players take turns with the tiles. One player tries to move all the tiles while the other maneuvers the tiles to prevent this from happening. Also released for the Genesis. *Shanghai III* for the SNES was only released in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"The low resolution of the SNES makes some of the tiles on the default Chinese character tiles hard to distinguish. Luckily there are many other options for the tiles. This game does not support the mouse, which is unfortunate, though the controller works alright." – SNES Central (snescentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Shanghai*, as you might possibly be aware, gives you a pile of pattered tiles on the screen, which you've got to remove two-by-two by pairing them off. And, er, that's it. It really couldn't be simpler. It's also incredibly boring, but in an oddly therapeutic way which, if it catches you unawares, can easily keep you gazing at the screen for hours." – *Super Play* (June 1993)



Insider Insight:
I was introduced to the classic Chinese tile-based game mahjong in undergraduate school. Attending university is supposed to broaden your horizons and make you more worldly, and so it did. I also learned that I was no whiz at the game. Despite the humiliation of defeat after defeat, I did manage to learn the tile suits! Before long I was sorting the dots from the bamboo pieces and tracking the winds, arrows, seasons, and flowers.

When *Shanghai II: Dragon's Eye* released on the Super Nintendo, I was more than familiar and comfortable with the tiles. My peers were amazed at how quickly I selected such foreign pieces and tore down the tile structures. While traditional mahjong did not play nice, mahjong solitaire was my friend.
– Michael Thomasson

Shaq-Fu

Publisher: Electronic Arts.
Developer: Delphine Software.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–8 players (2-player simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Shaq-Fu stars NBA great Shaquille O'Neal as a *Street Fighter II*-style martial arts expert who must battle six enemies in a series of one-on-one fights. Each character can power kick, fast kick, power punch, fast punch, block (called "force shield" here), crouch, jump, and taunt, and each has a favorite special move. A digitized Shaq hurls "Shaq-urikens"; martial arts champion/alien feline Kaori unleashes cyclones; Voodoo's eagle claw move conjures an eagle out of thin air; young mystic and skilled swordsman Rajah does a sword shockwave; undead sorcerer Mephis has lightning jaws; Sett Ra's mighty servant Beast launches balls of flame; and ancient evil enemy Sett Ra does a mummy wrap maneuver. The manual recommends that you experiment with the control pad and attack buttons to discover different moves.

In Story mode, Shaq travels from place to place on islands through Sett Ra's domain, fighting each character. Duel mode is for two players, while Tournament mode lets up to eight gamers battle it out (one-on-one) elimination-style. Unlike Story mode, Duel and Tournament let you play as the other characters. A Fury Bar that fills up when a fighter has been hit a certain number of times makes that character angry and more aggressive.

The ironic thing about this game is that even though it is based on one of the largest human beings most of us will ever encounter in our lifetimes, the characters are very small. Another weakness of the game is controls. Even with the smoothly animated fighters (courtesy of Delphine Software, developers of such games as *Flashback* and *Out of this World*) the controls are sluggish. The combination of inferior play mechanics and puny characters makes you feel more like a passive observer than an integral part of the action.

Taken as a whole the graphics are good, but for some reason Shaquille does not look much like his real-life counterpart, even in the larger static shots. While it is understandable that the small fighting Shaq has a generic look, there is no excuse for the lousy close-ups. If not for the blue-and-white pinstriped Orlando Magic (the team he played for at the time) uniform, you might not even be able to hazard a guess that the player represented is Shaquille O'Neal.

The music in *Shaq-Fu* is neither powerful nor moving, but it is not entirely unpleasant. Although repetitive, it does a fair job of evoking the tone and mood of the ornately drawn castle interiors, spooky jungles, rocky vistas, and other locations. The sound effects are hit and miss. For example, when a kick connects it sounds like fake gunfire, but some of the special moves sound cool.

The story mode is a good idea, but the shallow storyline has cheesy dialogue and does not add anything to the basic action of the game. The fury bar is also a solid idea, as it can potentially give a losing player a lift, making for a closer contest. The Genesis version of the game has three more stages and five additional fighters: Auroch, Colonel, Diesel, Leotsu, and Nezu. The Game Boy and Game Gear versions lack Tournament mode.

Memories: Throughout Shaquille O'Neal's storied NBA career, the dominant center was accused of dividing his interests into too many areas other than basketball. Most of the flack heaped upon him came from his stint as a rap recording artist and his moonlighting as an actor, starring in such films as *Kazaam* and *Steel*. As with many other Shaq ventures that were not basketball related,

Shaq-Fu

Shaq-Fu was an inferior product. It received mixed reviews upon release, but has been largely panned ever since.

Notable Quotable:

"It says quite a bit about the lack of imagination in today's video game industry that Electronic Arts has used so dynamic a figure as O'Neal in such a dull and obvious premise: On a trip to Japan, Shaq enters the Second World, where he goes mano a mano with a series of bad guys and gals in a quest to rescue the child-god Nezu. (If that sounds like a bad movie, it is. Remember *The Golden Child* starring Eddie Murphy?) And true to bad-movie form, even the briefest bits of dialogue are stilted, conveying none of Shaq's ebullient personality. A sample exchange: 'Be careful, prince. You might hurt yourself with those swords.' 'My swords will make you think twice about that comment.' What about the real point of the game—the action? It only goes to prove that years after the arrival of Capcom's *Street Fighter II*, rival software companies still have no idea how to program a fighting game." – *Entertainment Weekly* (December 1994)

Insider Insight:

I used to write a column for the *Digital Press* fanzine called "Double Jeopardy" in which I would revisit a poorly regarded game and try to find some redeeming qualities. It was a courtroom-style affair, and I would do my best Judge Wapner imitation as I deemed the game "not guilty" (underrated) or "guilty" (a total loss).

When *Shaq-Fu* appeared in my courtroom it was early on in my tenure as *Digital Press* editor, and in those days we would chat about our ideas for a while before beginning the writing process. I remember when I first brought up the idea for doing *Shaq-Fu* in "Double Jeopardy," some of the other writers told me not to do it. I had never played the game before and they felt it was best to keep it so. Now keep in mind, this was for a column about bad games. They were implying that *Shaq-Fu* was so bad it was too bad for a column about bad games. So bad that someone who intentionally played bad games should avoid it.

The charge read, "This poster child for licensed, celebrity-endorsed garbage is among the worst fighters ever made." Although I found the game had a number of significant flaws, I did not think it was nearly as bad as my cohorts apparently did. Not to say the game is good by any means, but I can think of worse fighters on the SNES alone—*WeaponLord* and *Rise of the Robots* come to mind. – Jeff Belmonte

Shien's Revenge

Publisher: Vic Tokai.
Developer: Almanic.
Game Type: First-Person Shooter/ First-Person Action, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Designed by longtime SF/fantasy author and manga artist Go Nagai, *Shien's Revenge* has players—as the titular ninja—guiding a cursor-enhanced, disembodied arm through seven stages (Japan, China, France, Mongolia, South America, Greece, and Jigen's Castle), hurling flying stars at assassins, flying fish, snakes dropping from treetops, Robo Troops, Platoon Bats, Saw Tooth, Jao the dragon, Invincible Tank, a cyborg called The Undertaker, and other enemies. At the end of each level a scaling, screen-filling boss must be defeated.

The first-person action, which scrolls automatically, evokes the bonus stages in *Shinobi* (SMS), but Shien can also wield a dagger (hyperbolically called a "mighty sword"), which is used for blocking projectiles and for attacking enemies at close range. There are items to grab for health, invincibility, points, continues, and ninja magic, the last of which inflicts damage on all on-screen enemies. A row of candles indicate Shien's life meter.

Shien's Revenge is compatible with the Super NES Mouse for quick, easy control, but the action is repetitious (if fairly enjoyable). The sounds, though high quality, are also repetitious. *Shien's Revenge*, which features a Practice mode and three difficulty levels (easy, normal, and hard), is also Super Scope compatible, but it is not mentioned on the box. *Operation Wolf* fans may want to try the game. Released in Japan as *Shien: The Blade Chaser*.

Notable Quotable:

"With its original perspective, *Shien's Revenge* looks great. But at six levels it's a little short. Just when you get the hang of the controls, you're finished!" – *Game Players* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"After a mere three stages, *Shien's Revenge* starts to drag. The main problem is that nothing changes, and every stage is functionally identical to the first. There are three types of enemy in each stage: normal troops who fire at you from the distance, less common palette-swapped enemies who do the same thing but faster, and the enemies who appear right in front of you . . . You move sideways through the stage, repeatedly disposing of these three threats until you reach the end-of-stage boss . . . while the unique control method and playstyle is fun and well-implemented, a little more variety would have gone a long, long way towards improving *Shien's Revenge*." – VGJunk (retrovania-vgjunk.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight:
I adored SNK's *The Super Spy* on the Neo Geo. There was something unique about the first-person shooter and beat-'em-up game combination. SNK followed it up with the *Crossed Swords* series, which was similar, but with more of a hack-and-slash style of gameplay. I loved the scaling, sprite-based, first-person perspective, and being able to see my character's arms and weapons visible on screen. I had been longing for such a game on my Super Nintendo for some time when *Shien's Revenge* came along and filled the void quite nicely.

With a love story involving time-travelling ninjas, such a tale is hard to top! In the game I travelled the world, visiting such exotic locales as France, South America, Greece, Mongolia, Spain, and more. I even survived the Quin Dynasty in the third century B.C. in China!

Secondly, the game gave me an excuse to pull the mouse peripheral out of the closet. It had pretty much been retired after I grew bored with *Mario Paint*. The game played well with the common SNES controller, but killing covert mercenaries is always better with a trackball-related pointing device. – Michael Thomasson

Side Pocket

Publisher: Data East.
Developer: Iguana Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Billiards, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Sporting a top-down view of the table, *Side Pocket* lets you shoot pool on your SNES. In the One Player Pocket Game, you have a stock of sixteen balls to beat a target score to advance to the next stage. You begin in Los Angeles and progress to Las Vegas, San Francisco, New York, and Atlantic City. You earn bonus points by sinking balls numerically or consecutively (without missing a shot). Occasionally the word "super" will appear, and a ball will begin to flash. Striking that ball before any others gives the cue ball extra momentum. When a flashing star appears on one of the pockets, sinking a ball into that pocket gives you extra points, extra stock (number of shots remaining), or an extra shot at the end of that stage. You can also get these extras by sinking the last ball into a specific "zone" pocket.

The Two Player Pocket Game is a five-set match. After five sets the player with the most points wins. If you sink the cue ball ("scratch") you lose a turn, and if you miss three shots in a row your opponent automatically wins. To see who goes first, players "lag," which is a shoot-off to see who can stop the cue ball closest to the head cushion without touching it. In the Two Player Nine Ball Game you can select a 3-game, 7-game, or 15-game series. The object is simple in this mode: the player who hits the nine ball into any pocket wins. There's one catch, though: the player must hit the lowest numbered ball on the table before hitting any other ball. Finally, a special Trick Shot Game features nineteen different shots with obstacles and blocked-off pockets.

You can hit the cue ball dead center, which applies no English, or you can hit it off-center to angle it right or left, or give it forward or backward spin. If the cue strikes the ball on top hard enough with a downward stroke you can get the ball to jump over other balls.

Like the Genesis cartridge released the previous year, the Super NES game is a nice upgrade over the NES version (which was an imminently playable port of Data East's 1986 arcade game), complete with jukebox, city-to-city travel, enhanced graphics, and passwords for saving progress. It is one of the better pool games of the era and showed up on a number of other systems, including the Game Boy and Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:
"This is slick, with excellent graphics of both the table and the between-round babe. But despite its easy interface, it's not really a pool simulation—just a fun distraction." – *Game Players* (December 1993)

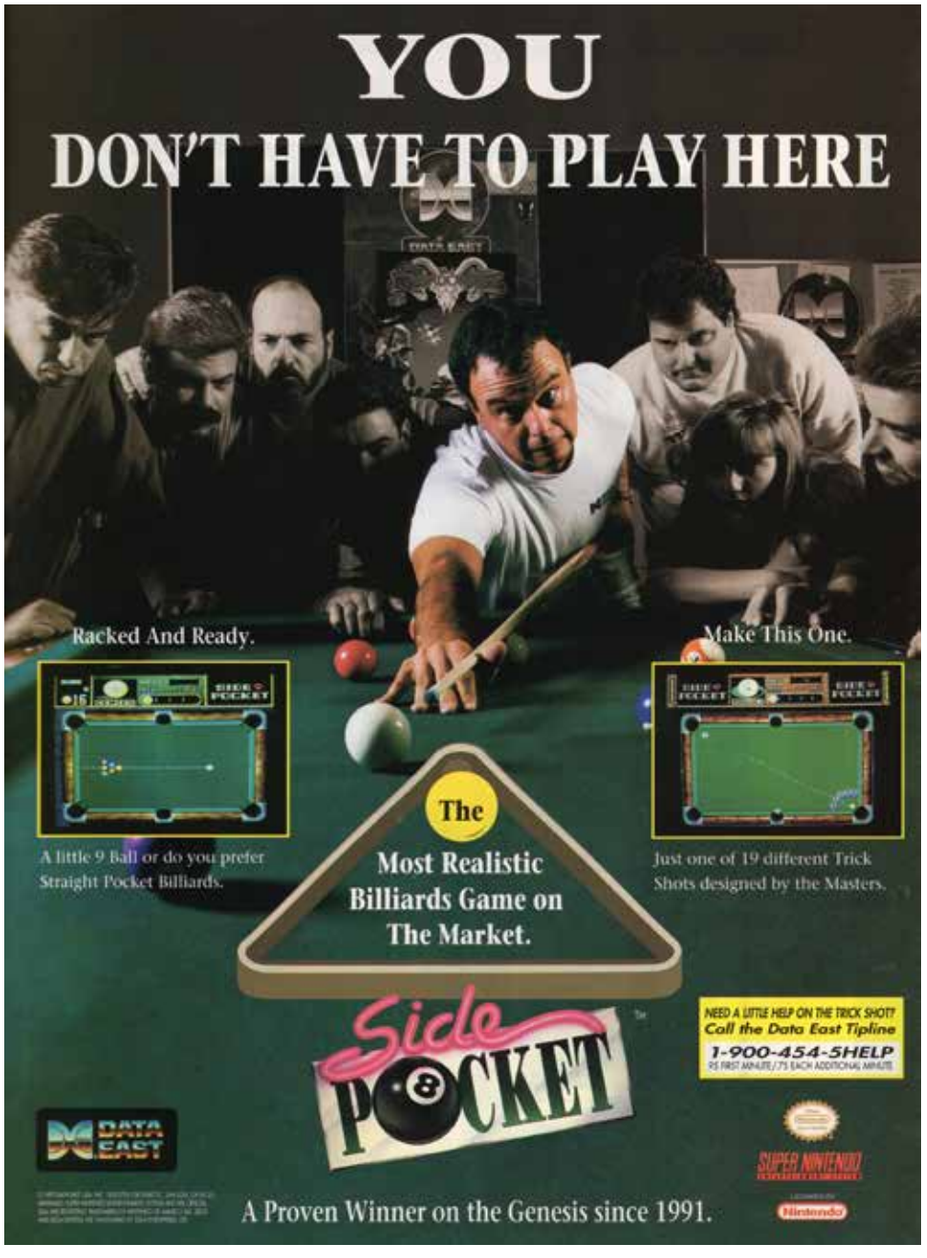
Notable Quotable:
"*Side Pocket* is a great game for pool enthusiasts and casual video game pool players alike. There are plenty of great options and genuine pool strategies to keep serious players interested and yet it's simple enough to play without the manual. Whether you're slick with a stick or a fool at pool, you'll enjoy *Side Pocket*." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the things I recall working on was the main menu. It is a full-screen image of a lady at a bar with a cocktail in front of her. The menu items are listed in a framed box in the upper right corner. I believe this was an image taken from the Genesis version of the game, which required 'touching up' to take advantage of the extra colors the SNES offered." – Jools Watsham (retrowaretv.com), former graphic designer for Iguana Entertainment

Notable Quotable:

"Since the graphics capabilities of the Super Nintendo far outweighed the Sega Genesis, it was the art team's job to upgrade the art quality by basically re-touching the Sega graphics using the higher number of color palettes of the Super Nintendo . . . there was one screen that had a brick wall with some text info overlaid onto it. I think maybe it was a scoreboard type thing. Anyway, I was touching up the graphics and I tried to subtly put me and my girlfriend's initials in the graphic, but apparently I wasn't subtle enough, and my boss saw it and got upset with me . . . That was the last time I tried that!" – Adam McCarthy (retrowaretv.com), former graphic artist for Iguana Entertainment



Insider Insight:

When you are little, your parents are more than your role models—they're almost god-like. They are your entire world. For me, my parents were more than that—they were also fun. They played video games and were fiercely competitive. *Side Pocket* was a game that they often played together, and as a family with my twin brother we would spend hours on rainy nights shooting virtual pool.

While my father was the Ralph Kramden of the house—the undisputed king—my mother ruled *Side Pocket* with an iron first. After we would go off to school she would clean the house, get dinner started, and play games like *Vegas Stakes*, *Super Mario All-Stars*, and *Side Pocket* when she was bored after her soap operas. Her skill wasn't just a matter of playing every day. Great in math, she understood angles and speed in a way my father and her young boys did not. She rarely played pool in real life, but on the Super Nintendo she was a black widow of sorts.

One Saturday night, she ran the table on my little brother in a way that confirmed her dominance forever. Knocking in a ball on the break, she then proceeded to hit every ball into a pocket before finishing him off with a bank shot that sent the eight ball into the pocket she called. My father, brother, and I just stood there in silence. It was scary. She did not have to say anything, either. The woman that cooked for us, cleaned for us, and loved us more than anyone else in the world now wore the pants in the family. Ashamed, my brother and I went to our rooms and played with our action figures. Dad could not make eye contact with his own wife. She was that good. – Patrick Hickey Jr.

SimAnt: The Electric Ant Colony

Publisher: Maxis Software.
Developer: Imagineer.
Game Type: Life Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

This oddball offshoot of the Sim series, which includes such titles as *SimCity* and *SimEarth*, puts players in control of an ant that is responsible for the development and maintaining of a virtual ant colony. This consists of gathering food; eating caterpillars; digging tunnels; regulating the creation of new ants (breeders, workers, and soldiers); fortifying nest walls; surviving floods, human feet, and lawnmowers; directing other ants in their activities (foraging, digging, etc.); leading armies against ants, spiders, and other enemies; and more.

In Full Game mode, the ultimate goal is to overtake the garden, infiltrate the house, and drive away the human occupants. Scenario Games, which were added to the SNES version, pit you in eight scenarios against evil red ants, with levels getting more difficult as you progress. There is also a Tutorial Game that teaches you the basics of life as an ant and an in-game Ant Encyclopedia that gives real ant facts and some gameplay strategies.

The action can get tedious, but real-time strategy fans and simulation buffs will be suitably engrossed. *SimAnt* is compatible with the Super NES Mouse, giving it the feel of the original computer game released in 1991. The Sim family of games continued for a variety of computers and consoles, including the highly acclaimed *The Sims* franchise, which began in 2000.

Notable Quotable:

"The controls are a simple point-and-click interface, but it takes a while to get the hang of what the different commands actually do and when you need to use them . . . The game isn't too challenging for beginners, but a lot of reading is required . . . Although *SimAnt*'s graphics are very simplistic, they do provide many angles . . . tunes are repetitive and cutesy . . . Ants may be the ultimate in insect pests, but *SimAnt*, an absorbing and complex sim-style game, won't bug you at all." – *GamePro* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

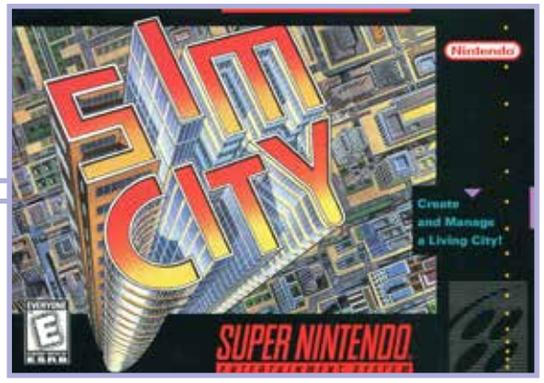
"*SimAnt* was a very playful game, relative to a lot of our other simulations, but we still tried to be very accurate in terms of the way the ants behaved in the game, the way the pheromone trails operated. I've always been fascinated with ants. One of the things I wanted to do with *SimAnt* was show people why ants are so cool, especially adults. But it turned out that the big hit for *SimAnt* was [with] 12-year-old boys and they kind of already understood ants were cool, but they were the ones that played this game and bought this game the most. I don't think I convinced a whole lot of adults how cool the ants were. In some sense, ant colonies are the most elaborate intelligence that we fully understand. We have no clue really about the human brain. We know bits and pieces about the way the brain works, but ant colonies, we pretty much understand the way they operate and they're very efficient and very smart. A typical ant colony is around the intelligence of a dog in terms of problem-solving and learning. Most people don't realize that." – *SimAnt* creator Will Wright (guru.bafta.org)

Notable Quotable:

"What grabbed me right away is the Ant Encyclopedia included within the game. Besides being very educational and dare I say, fun to read, this little encyclopedia will probably be necessary reading material if you hope to achieve any sort of *SimAnt* success. The level of control over your colony is astonishing, calling for backup is a simple task, and navigating through menus that let you control what your colony does, how efficiently it does it, and what type of ants are needed most and so forth is as easy as one-two-three. The game does a great job at making you feel like an ant through mondo-cute stills and some really funny animations, like when your ant's head gets huge and the facial expression is like that of a cartoon. The music is mostly standard fare . . . oh-so-cute sound effects. Your ants make little grunts, the rainfall sounds good, the lawnmower sounds menacing, and the 'crunch crunch' sound gets points for weirdness. Graphically speaking, *SimAnt* is above and beyond average. While the view underground isn't all that great, it's forgivable considering the above-ground view, the great-looking ants and their environments, and the very cool 'ant-imations.' Another strong point graphically is the variation of landscapes, from carpet to cans, dirt to dirt, and indoors to outside; everything's different, and it all looks good. The only big weakness of *SimAnt* is the too-low difficulty level." – RPGfan (www.rpgfan.com)

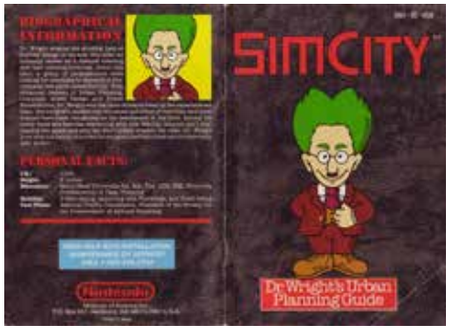
SimCity

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Maxis Software.
Game Type: World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1991.



Based on the classic 1989 computer game designed by Will Wright, *SimCity* for the SNES offers the same type of open-ended, city-building gameplay. However, it does add a number of new features, including multiple game speeds, new building types, changing seasons, and a revamped tutorial system in which nerdy Dr. Wright takes you through a Practice mode, dishes out advice, and announces disasters, available rewards, and cities growing to a new classification. In addition, Bowser is on hand to unleash Godzilla-type destruction.

You view the game from overhead, moving a cursor around the screen to design your city. As a mayor with god-like powers you will raise and lower taxes, lay down power lines, create road and rail transport networks, deal with pollution, traffic congestion, and zoning laws, allocate resources (to pay for such things as roads and policing), place structures (airports, houses, schools, factories, shops, stadiums, and police and fire stations), face disasters (fires, floods, earthquakes, tornadoes, and airplane crashes), and much more. You can start from scratch on one of 1,000 different landforms or select from eight built-in scenarios. Once you have 500,000 residents in your city you are awarded an SNES-exclusive Mario statue. Maps take a long time to load, but this is an excellent port of a popular, immersive, time-consuming game.



Notable Quotable:

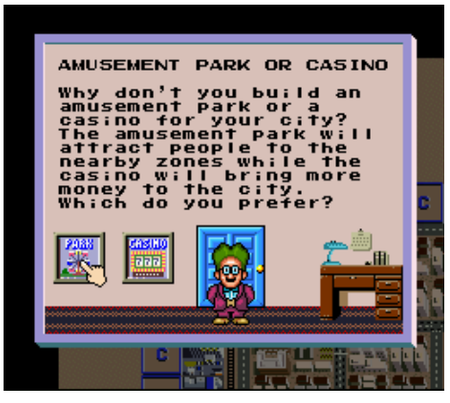
"*SimCity*, the Super Nintendo version, is one of my favorite games of all time . . . it is so addicting." – James "The Angry Video Game Nerd" Rolfe (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Creating and maintaining your own city is incredibly compelling, and watching it grow before your eyes provides some serious entertainment . . . there's plenty of little delights like watching all your boats, planes, and helicopters going about their business . . . the inclusion of the four seasons varies the graphic style immensely." – *Computer and Video Games* (July 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Steering a pokey cursor around with a d-pad doesn't make for a great mouse substitute, but SNES *SimCity* remains the most memorable version of Will Wright's groundbreaking, genre-defining game, if only for the veneer of 'Nintendo-ness' it paints over a relatively dry experience. The SNES port drops this former PC game into the world of 16-bit production values, turning Wright into a green-haired cartoon character, as well as throwing Mario and Bowser into a setting very unlike the Mushroom Kingdom. But the most impressive addition to this version of *SimCity* comes in the form of Soyo Oka's soothing, non-intrusive soundtrack." – Bob Mackey (www.usgamer.net).



SimCity

Insider Insight:
The SNES version of *SimCity* was my first sandbox type of game, and it holds the most nostalgia for me. When I was younger, I would try my hardest to build as much as I could before running out of money, and then I would sit there and watch sadly as I could not figure out how to play the game much longer than fifteen minutes. Luckily I was saved by the unlimited money code that I discovered in the back of a *Tips & Tricks* gaming magazine. From that point on, every time I played, my ultimate goal became to create a Megalopolis. Unfortunately, I have yet to accomplish that goal. I think I need to find a university that has a degree in "SimCity-Nomics." – Eric Perez

Insider Insight:
When I was in the beginning of my middle school years my sisters passed down the Sega Genesis to me, and I played it almost every day. My favorite games were *Earthworm Jim 2*, *Ristar*, and *Mortal Kombat II*. During heated *MK II* fights with one of my sisters I button-mashed, unaware that she had memorized many of the combos—a skill to this day I have not acquired. My Sega Genesis has survived not only the years, but also my older sister's tendency to take consoles away with her.

While *Ristar* and *Earthworm Jim 2* remain a regular part of my gameplay, sadly *MK II* is nowhere to be found. Besides the Genesis we had the Sega Dreamcast, on which I played *Power Stone*, *Mortal Kombat Gold*, and *Crazy Taxi*, and a Nintendo 64, where I enjoyed *ClayFighter*, *Glover*, *Banjo-Kazooie*, *Mario Kart 64*, and *Pokémon Stadium*. At one point we had an Xbox that unfortunately became infested with cockroaches and thus was thrown to the curb. Plenty of consoles, yet we never owned a Super Nintendo.

I had a friend on my competitive cheerleading team who also had a Nintendo 64. I would go to her house during the summer of cheer camp and we would play one of my personal favorites: *Mario Party*. One night when we were bored my friend told me she had another game system in a different room, so we went in there. It was a room with an older TV set. The console she was referring to was a Super Nintendo, and I was like, "Wow, this is cool! I've never played this!"

The game we ended up playing on the SNES was *SimCity*, which is kind of an odd choice for a couple of young girls, but she didn't have many games for the console. In fact, I can't remember what other SNES carts she owned, probably because we had so much fun with *SimCity*. I had played the PC version of *The Sims*. This was in the early 2000s—an era when motherlode (a popular code used to gain money) was discovered, celebrity Sim creations and Sim music videos became popular, and when you needed the exact keyboard shortcut to caddy corner your furniture. *SimCity* was not based on trying to keep your Sim alive or even to attempt to Woo-Hoo the Grim Reaper. Rather, *SimCity* was a city-building simulation game where you could face a plethora of disasters, including Bowser making like Godzilla on a sunny Sunday afternoon.

When we first started playing *SimCity* a tornado came through, and I remember thinking, "Oh, my god, what is happening? You can't stop the weather!"

SimCity is fairly complicated. My friend sorta knew how to play, but I was just farting around with it, at least at first. I remember trying to figure out how to build my own city and getting completely frustrated, but then I discovered you could cause destruction on purpose by well . . . complete and utter neglect, inability to strategize, and the discovery that I could choose a disaster to happen at will. I would catch my city on fire and cause tornadoes—not necessarily being the best mayor I could be.

Sometimes I would try to make things go right. Take care of the city. Make sure my Sims were living their best life. But it wasn't as much fun as watching sheer chaos. I mean, when you played *RollercoasterTycoon*, did you make a perfectly complex and safe roller coaster every time? No, you created a complex death machine that would make *Final Destination 3* blush.

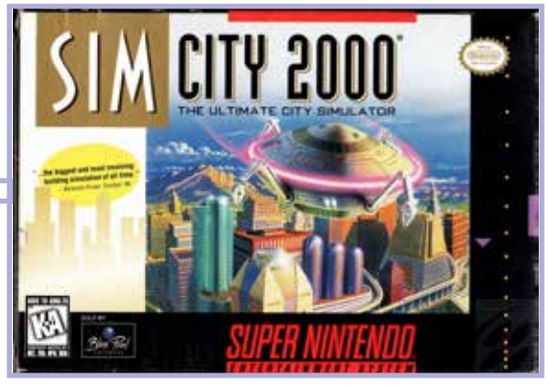
Some things never change. I did pretty much the same type of destructive thing with *The Sims* on the PC—a much easier game than *SimCity*. I would watch my older sisters play *The Sims*, and when they finally started to let me play, I would watch my families fall apart. I caused chaos, often on purpose.

One Sim, the legendary and immortal Mortimer Goth, was quite the lothario. "Really, you just had to flirt with the Sim lady next to you," I remember thinking. I felt so bad for his Sim wife. He was a mess. I thought, "You know what, I'm gonna have my Sim slap that guy." You were able to do a lot of ridiculous things in *The Sims*. Don't believe me? Perhaps you should watch Sim mod videos, though I warn you not all of the mods are joyful "Delco webney," which is Simlish (the language that Sims speak) for "believe it or not."

Maybe the reason I like *SimCity* and *The Sims* is why I was drawn to horror movies. They are a way to experience things that I am afraid of in real life. That is what horror and some video games do. You are able to experience things that make you uncomfortable from a safe distance. The SNES was a fascinating and memorable console to play, even for a brief time, and I hope to experience it again. I would like to watch Bowser destroy the city one last time. – Cierra Caballero

SimCity 2000

Publisher: Black Pearl Software.
Developer: Maxis Software.
Game Type: World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1995.



As a mayor with god-like powers and access to past, present, and future technology, it is your job to build the city from the ground up and ensure that your citizens have everything they need. You will finance, build, and maintain houses, bridges, power plants, military bases, factories, airports, fire stations, roads, shops, a water supply system, and other staples of city life. Also, you will want to beautify your city by adding trees, lakes, and ponds. Bulldozers are available for use in landscaping, changing the altitude of the land, and de-zoning residential, commercial, and industrial land.

As your city grows, you must increase transportation routes and build more facilities for your citizens. High taxes, pollution, overcrowding, poor city planning, and other problems can drive away the masses, putting your city's future in doubt. Floods, fires, tornadoes, hurricanes, earthquakes, and monsters can also have an effect on the success or lack thereof of your city. Read the (biannual) newspaper to keep up with current events and to find out what the citizens are saying. Maps are available for when you need help planning the future of your city. The top-down display of the original *SimCity* has been replaced by an isometric perspective, and terrain is now customizable.

Based on the 1994 computer game, the SNES version of *SimCity 2000* differs in several ways. Riots and volcanoes were removed, and there are fewer songs. Stock photographs were replaced by anime-like pictures. Names of cities, mayors, and teams were reduced from thirty-two characters to eight. There are new gifts, including a bigger city hall (at 1,000,000 population), a TV station (2,000,000), and a rocket-launching pad (3,000,000). Like the other SNES games in the series, this one regrettably lacks SNES Mouse support. Also released for the Game Boy Advance, Nintendo 64, PlayStation, and Saturn. Followed by *SimCity DS* (Nintendo DS), *SimCity Creator* (Wii), and other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics look okay and the sound effects are fun, but the music is repetitive. The control interface is awkward, especially if you're used to the mouse or keyboard from the computer version. Despite the flaws, if you love Sims, you'll be happy to see this cart." – *GamePro* (January 1997)

Insider Insight: My first exposure to the *SimCity* franchise was on my family's Macintosh computer. Along with falling in love with *The Oregon Trail* and *Lemmings*, I spent countless hours watching my brother play *SimCity 2000*. The only way I could ever get any time to build my own city was to find a copy for my SNES. I probably rented that game a dozen times before I was able to find it for sale at a toy store. I was not particularly good at it, but I enjoyed playing with the different tools and slowly figured it out. I spent countless hours building random cities just to force the natural disasters. Nothing was quite as satisfying as destroying the city you just spent hours working to build.

Over time I got better and better at navigating the game and figuring out just what every command and tool did. It was a little disappointing that the developers had to cut so much that was in the computer version of the game, and the load times were horrendous. I remember the amount of time to zoom in or out, or to even scroll the screen was just crazy long. It really slowed down the game to the point of almost making it unbearable. Regardless, for a young kid with an interest in building and architecture, this franchise definitely started (or at the very least influenced) my love for design and spatial organization. It was a valuable tool that led me to follow my interests and turn them into a career. – Anthony J. La Gambina

SimEarth: The Living Planet

Publisher: FCI.
Developer: Tomcat System.
Game Type: World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Adapted from the 1990 computer game and inspired by James Lovelock's Gaia theory suggesting that Earth is a giant living organism, *SimEarth: The Living Planet* lets you control your own living planet from beginning to end, ten billion years into the future. You can control one of eight planets (such as Mars, Venus, Desert Planet, or Ice Planet) or create a randomly generated world viewed from a top-down perspective. There are three difficulty levels from which to choose: easy, normal, and difficult.

In this immersive, time-consuming game, you will adjust the atmosphere and rainfall to make deserts or rainforests; control earthquakes, tidal waves, meteor showers, and volcanos; evolve animals and humans; decide which species (dinosaurs, birds, fish, etc.) should appear first; experiment with global warming; move mountains and destroy continents; create deserts, forests, jungles, oceans, and swamps; and much more. Using a cursor to navigate maps, graphs, menus, charts, and the like, your ultimate goal is to create conditions for life to form and evolve into an advanced civilization. Also released for the TurboGrafx-16 CD.

Notable Quotable:

"While it's never too early to teach kids to respect the biosphere, the same may not be true of introducing them to complicated simulations such as *SimEarth: The Living Planet*, which has more variables (temperature, precipitation, etc.) than a polynomial equation. There's something to be said for this, though: A task as simple as 'growing a daisy'—one option offered here—requires knowing far more than which button to push to cream the bad guy." – *Entertainment Weekly* (April 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"This version of *SimEarth* is far superior to the PC version . . . It looks better, it sounds better, and it plays better . . . *SimEarth* is a very fun software toy that allows many different possibilities for planet types and animal life. Often the most interesting thing to do is to have a lush, perfect planet, and then suddenly boil the oceans away or turn the sun off to see what can survive in the forbidding new world. It is doubly fun when there are intelligent species around that try to cling to whatever kind of survival they can. I recommend the game to anyone that liked the terraforming part of *Spore* or to anyone interested in earth science as a whole. It is a very interesting game." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Insider Insight:

A daunting task lay before my thirteen-year-old self: write a 300-word review of a video game playable on a current game system for a student newsletter. The catch? The game must be educational, non-violent, and available for rental from a video store. Additionally, it should be tailored to the audience of several hundred homeschoolers, and must be typewritten and free from errors. Yes, on an actual typewriter.

As a proud SNES owner I felt more than up to the challenge, and I was enticed by the prospect of a free video game rental. I narrowed down my choice to either *SimAnt* or *SimEarth*. If you had to choose between playing with ants in the backyard and playing with an entire planet, which would you choose? I fell victim to the mentality of "Why go small, when you can go big?," selected *SimEarth*, and headed home to begin my foray into video game journalism.

Having played countless hours of *SimCity* on the SNES, I had high hopes for *SimEarth*. I looked forward to praising its graphics, high concept, and accessibility, desiring even at that young age to prove that video games could be used for good.

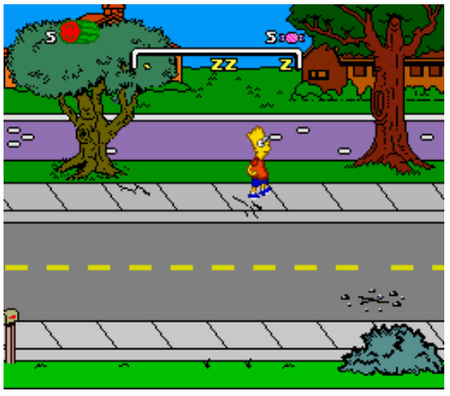
Less than thirty minutes into *SimEarth*, it became painfully apparent that I should have gone with the ants. Lacking the game's instruction manual only added insult to injury, with key information missing about how to play the game. I don't remember everything I said about *SimEarth* in my review for the student newsletter, but I do recall the overall tone was along the lines of, "I'm sure it's great if you have a lot of time on your hands." The moral of the story is: "Don't expect to recreate Earth in the span of a two-day rental." – Jon D. Harrison

The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

The aptly titled *The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare* finds bratty but lovable Bart Simpson trying, for once in his life, to complete his homework on time. Unfortunately, fifteen minutes into his studies he falls asleep at his desk and enters a strange dreamland filled with crawling mailboxes, floating Lisa Fairies, giant pacifiers, and other surrealisms. As Bart, your objective is to locate your homework papers, which have flown out the window and scattered through five different worlds that you can play in any order: Bartzilla (think of Bart as Godzilla, walking through a town, breathing fire, shooting lasers out of his eyes, and climbing a building); The Temple of Maggie (in the deepest, darkest corner of the Springfield Rainforest); Itchy & Scratchy (the cartoon cat and mouse are after you); Bartman (a side-scrolling shooter level where Bart flies); and Bart's Bloodstream (think *Fantastic Voyage*, but you're floating in your own body). There is also Windy World, which is the hub where Bart must search for the gateway to each of the other worlds.

You are equipped with a number of boyish weapons in this game, including the ability to burp up soda, fire a slingshot, swing a hammer, and spit watermelon seeds. Also, depending on the theme of the level you will do less conventional things, such as breathe fireballs, destroy buildings, and brandish an Indiana Jones-style whip. The action ranges from running, to jumping, to swimming, to flying, to shooting, to riding a skateboard; and there are plenty of obstacles and enemies to avoid and/or confront, including mud puddles, carving knives, kisses from grandma, pacifiers spit out by Maggie, helicopters, tanks, unstable stone floors, Smithers, and Mighty Homer Kong. Most obstacles steal Bart's "Z"s (energy), while others do more unpredictable things, such as fairy dust turning him into a frog. At the end you will be graded on your performance, with your family looking on. Also released for the Genesis.



Notable Quotable:

"I finally beat the game after all these years . . . A little frustrating and maybe not quite as good as I remember it being [as a kid], but it was pretty good." – PeanutButterGamer (YouTube)

The Simpsons: Bart's Nightmare

Notable Quotable:

"The first thing you'll notice about *Bart's Nightmare* is that Acclaim refuses to make an easy game out of any of *The Simpsons* titles. In fact, it took yours truly at least an hour of solid play before I could see enough of the game to appreciate it. Time after time I struggled as Bart was tripped up, shot at, blown to bits, flattened, and dropped from dizzying heights. My persistence paid off, though, as I found the game was much better than my initial impression the further I was able to get . . . Graphically, *Bart's Nightmare* is right in line with the other Simpsons games: close to the cartoon quality, but nothing special by 16-bit standards. Outside of the opening sequence, the Super NES's capabilities are barely tapped. The same goes for the sound and music, which are about average . . . The real fun of the game is in the individual stages, each with its unique play. My favorite is the Temple of Maggie, where you must hop from platform to platform dodging blue devils, avoiding speeding pacifiers, and trying to stay on solid ground . . . The 'echo' effect is one of the high points in the game, and the detailed graphics are a great contrast to the very simplistic ones in the Bartman stage." – Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:

One day when I was a kid, my grandmother took me to the mall to pick out a new Super Nintendo game. The title I chose was *Bart's Nightmare*, and it was a tough one. At first I thought it was the type of game I would not like because I could not quite grasp the gameplay, but it grew on me. When my cousins game over for Christmas week that year, I knew they would figure the game out rather quickly. After that I pretty much knew how to navigate through the game, but I always seemed to struggle on the *Indiana Jones*-type sequences and could never truly finish it. Even as an adult I still can't finish it.

Around the same time *Street Fighter II* had come out for the SNES, and I wanted to play that as well. At school, this kid Mike I used to hang out with had the game, and he offered to trade me *Bart's Nightmare* in exchange, but only for a week. I will never forget the day I brought *SFII* home. After I played it for about an hour my mother found out that I had traded with Mike and she was livid. She screamed at me about how expensive games were, and how I might lose it, and that I should never trade a game with anyone at school because I might not get it back. She then demanded that I trade it back immediately, so I did. Mike's mom yelled at him, too. – Raymond Fix

Sink or Swim

Publisher: Titus.
Developer: Zeppelin Games.
Game Type: Action/Adventure/Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The SS Lucifer has crashed into an iceberg off the coast of Greenland. Fires rage all over the ship, and ice-cold seawater pours into the hull faster than the pumps can handle. Stationed alone in a small Sea Rescue Station, you as Kevin Codner hop in your tiny submarine and go to the rescue. The action picks up aboard the burning, sinking ship, where you must endure 100 levels of brain-straining, pressure-packed action, rescuing panicky, lemming-like (i.e., dumb as dirt) passengers as you go.

Tasks include swimming, climbing ladders, patching up burst pipes that spray scalding steam, providing oxygen bottles and dinghies for the passengers (who walk left and right and occasionally climb ladders), flipping conveyer belt and hydraulic bridge switches to alter the routes of passengers, dropping bombs to destroy pathway obstructions, using a crane to move pathway obstructions, and much more. In each level you must rescue a certain number of passengers, and many levels have a time limit (represented by rising water). Thankfully, you receive a password for saving progress after each level. After every twenty levels the visual theme changes to reflect where you are in the ship.

Thanks to thoughtfully designed puzzles, nice animation, uplifting audio, and the inherent excitement of being aboard a sinking ship, the game is a frenetic, highly replayable puzzler that is as challenging as it is addictive. Though the cartoonish characters look a little goofy, impressive rippling water effects and a colorfully detailed ship help make this a title worth preserving. Adapted from the 1993 PC game of the same name, which only had sixty levels, *Sink or Swim* should appeal to fans of such games as *The Lost Vikings* and *Lemmings*.

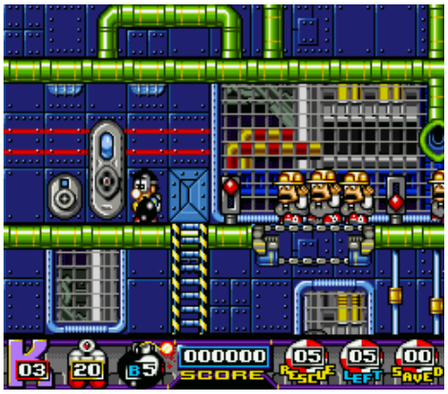
Fun Fact: The Mega Drive and Game Gear versions of *Sink or Swim*, which were called *S.S. Lucifer: Man Overboard!*, were exclusive to Europe and Australia.

Notable Quotable:

"*Sink or Swim* lacks head-to-head competition, but its cute puzzles might keep novices playing to the end. Veterans, however, may soon jump ship." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"A puzzle game that will have you hooked! There's plenty of strategy involved in this one where you must rescue the crew members on an ocean liner. This is a title for any puzzle fan. The graphics could be punched up, though." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)



Sküljagger: Revolt of the Westicans

Publisher: American Softworks Corporation.
Developer: Realtime Associates.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1992.

Notable for its inclusion of a storybook-style, eighty-page instruction manual that provides clues about secrets and hidden areas in the game, *Sküljagger* is a quirky platformer that has your character using a sword to battle such enemies as knights, rats, flying ants, and bald, chain-wielding pirates. There are gems to collect for protection (otherwise it is a one-hit death game) and for augmenting your sword with projectiles (your sword can also deflect enemy projectiles). Gems also provide extra time, additional lives (twenty-five green jewels gives you an extra man), and save points.

Curiously enough, there are fruit-flavored bubblegum power-ups that encase you in a large bouncing ball (a strange and amusing yet effective weapon), give you a balloon for flying, turn you into a projectile that can damage everything on screen and gather items, or allow you to spit out projectiles. A Bubble Gum Practice mode lets you test these powers. In addition, masks grant invisibility and invulnerability, and you can pick up rocks, barrels, and coconuts to throw them at enemies.

The running, jumping, climbing, sword-swinging action is fairly enjoyable, and the game moves at a nice, breezy pace. The password feature is convenient, and the swashbuckling atmosphere of the game is enhanced by a terrific musical score and fun-to-read text. The action plays out on twenty-one main maps and more than fifty hidden maps. On the negative side, there are blind jumps into bottomless pits and the enemies are repetitious. When the game was new in stores you could call a 1-800 number to talk to "Sküljagger."

Notable Quotable:
"The gameplay is too frustrating to make this an essential purchase. The idea of a pirate game is certainly a good one, but this title falls way short of the mark." – *N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Graphics that look like they were from an early-generation TurboGrafx-16 game at best . . . stupid-sounding pirate tunes . . . one lame excuse for a game. I couldn't bear it any longer after the second stage . . . Like any curious collector, you will try playing this game anyway, but you have been warned." – Doug Jackson (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:
"There are only two or three enemy types per stage, but I like how they don't regenerate, making it easier to explore. Your sword has good reach, but flying enemies like giant wasps swoop in from odd angles, making the jump-slash attack your best friend . . . I love the tropical scenery featuring lush islands, quaint villages, and crumbling ruins. The first stage offers a nice view of distant green islands in a shimmering blue sea. Even the warehouse stage is inviting thanks to the vine-covered ruins seen through the windows. There are alternate paths and hidden areas to discover, but I hate how you're sometimes expected to make 'leaps of faith' onto platforms out of view. Spicing things up are the occasional opportunities to man cannons to sink ships in the distance. The soundtrack is better than average, and the difficulty is reasonable." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com).

Insider Insight:
We were on a tight schedule to get *Sküljagger* done, as we had taken over for another developer and started from scratch. Our lead programmer spent so much time exploring the SNES architecture without getting gameplay up and running, I was panic-ridden until he finished his survey and got the whole engine together in a couple weeks. The team spent the last month or two working out of my house in crunch time; my wife treated us to fantastic dinners that almost made the crunch bearable. Sending the game off to the manufacturer was the first time I recall feeling the extreme difference between making every second count for weeks and weeks and then having a whole unplanned week in front of me; what I now call the "post partem" effect. It also demonstrated to me how productive a team could be when assembled under one roof, and that experience led me to get offices and hire full-time developers working together as Realtime Associates. – David Warhol

SkyBlazer

Publisher: Sony Imagesoft.
Developer: Ukiyotei Company.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

An overlooked gem, *SkyBlazer* borrows elements of play from such high-quality games as *Super Mario Bros.*, *Castlevania*, *Ninja Gaiden*, and *Shinobi*. Yes, the action is derivative in many respects, but mimicking some of the best games ever produced is not necessarily a bad thing. Players control Sky, who must run, jump, punch, kick, swim, fly (on a glider), and climb his way through eighteen stages (accessible via a world map), including Faltine's Woods, Temple Infernus, Cliffs of Peril, Towers of Tarolisk, and Petrolith Castle. Each stage is packed with a diverse assortment of enemies and obstacles, including samurai, lava monsters, spikes, and magicians.

Most areas scroll horizontally, but there are also vertical levels—including rotating tower sections that evoke *Tower Toppler*—and there are behind-your-character stages (á la *Space Harrier*) where you fly through the air collecting gems while avoiding spiked balls. Each time you defeat a boss, you will acquire the ability to cast a spell. You begin the game with an aura attack, which lets you fire powerful blasts at enemies, and you can add such powers as heal, time stop, lightning strike (hits all on-screen targets), comet flash (lets you fly over gaps), star fire (an attack that shoots in nine directions), and warrior force (makes you invincible and doubles your strength). You can also grab such helpful items as diamonds (100 gives you an extra life) and health and magic restorers. Near the end of the game you must defeat Ashura, the Lord of War, who has conquered the Realm.

In addition to solid (if sometimes overly familiar) gameplay, *SkyBlazer* has nice graphics and an elaborate musical score. Regrettably, it does suffer from one overriding flaw: It is too easy for most seasoned gamers.

Notable Quotable:
"What makes *SkyBlazer* a big winner is the gameplay. Variety, inventive effects, and a creative storyline make the game frustratingly good! It could be the sleeper hit of the season." – *GamePro* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The variety and solid play make this action game worth checking out. With few exceptions, each of the 16 areas has its own look and gameplay, and you can choose the order in which you want to take them on." – *Game Players* (February 1994)

Insider Insight:
SkyBlazer is my *de facto* favorite SNES game when I am suddenly asked to name my favorite. If I gave it some thought, I suppose *Super Metroid* probably deserves the position, but *SkyBlazer* came as such a surprise I prefer to rank it higher. Magazines of the time, such as *Super Play*, scored it in the 70% range, so I did not pay much attention until I bought a mint boxed copy at a clearance sale. Some video store was dumping all its cartridge games to make room for the PlayStation, and I bought about twenty new SNES games at five bucks a piece.

I went in with zero expectations and the game utterly blew me away. It pushed every visual trick in the SNES repertoire: Mode 7 flight, sprite stretching and distortion, rotation, transparencies, parallax scrolling, and pseudo-3D objects, all backed by an exotic soundtrack and Hindu-inspired story and atmosphere. This is where the game truly shines—the music and visual ambience.

Much like in *Shadow of the Beast*, the player is constantly teased by a mysterious world just out of reach. The starting level places you amidst rain-soaked ruins, with only minor backstory. Later you must navigate a river of sand dunes flowing out from a palace of antiquity and traverse a citadel in the sky, a dragon's tower, a fortress of storms, and other forgotten realms. Most of the levels can be accessed non-linearly, and each is a joy to behold. For years I tried to track down the head of Ukiyotei in an effort to know more about this gem, but those behind the game are as shrouded in secrecy as the world they created. – John Szczepaniak

SmartBall

Publisher: Sony Imagesoft.
Developer: Game Freak/System Sacom.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Take a look at its level design and you will immediately notice that *SmartBall* is one of countless games inspired by *Super Mario Bros.* The protagonist—though he can run, jump, swim, and release projectiles (red balls and iron balls, which he consumes and shoots)—is hardly a Mario-style character. Rather, he is an amorphous blob named Jerry who can flatten and stretch himself out as a means of battling enemies, which for the most part are cartoonish little critters and creatures, such as rabbits, fish, and mice. There are also obstacles, such as spikes and swinging pendulum blades. Oddly enough, naked men—viewed from behind—appear as enemies in later levels.

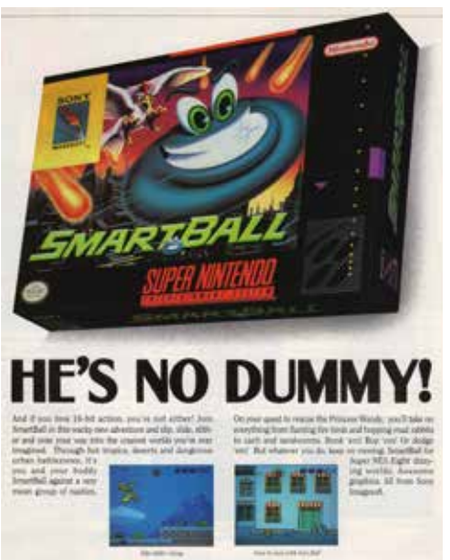
Jerry's stretching ability, which also lets him go through pipes and crawl across ceilings and walls, hinders and convolutes the enjoyment of the platforming action, meaning the unique thing about the game is what keeps it from being much fun. *SmartBall* is cute but unsophisticated in appearance, looking like an 8-bit platformer. The music is diverse, reflecting the various themes of the environments you will encounter, such as deserts, towns, ocean, forests, dungeons, ice, and the moon, the last of which includes Mode 7 scaling effects.

In each of the game's sixteen levels (there are eight worlds, each divided into two sections), you can find letters to spell out JERRY. In addition, there are purple flowers that sprout such useful items as balls, hearts, extra lives, and seeds that generate beanstalks that Jerry can climb to reach higher areas. The original version of the game, released in Japan in 1991, was called *Jerry Boy*, and it included towns between levels in which you could talk to townsfolk to move the story along. A potential Japan-only sequel was canceled.

Notable Quotable:
"*SmartBall* may be a little easy, but if you're looking for a platform adventure that offers a new angle to make a change from the endless Mario clones then take a shifty at this." – *N-Force* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"It's like *A Boy and His Blob* without the boy. You can do a lot, like climb walls and stick to the ceiling. The graphics and play control are great. If you like the concept, you'll probably like the game." – *Nintendo Power* (February 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Learning to control the wobbly little critters is half the fun . . . There are lots of hidden rooms and secret levels to discover and lots of platform-related puzzles to solve. The music that plays throughout is brilliant. It starts off with a slightly twee tune, reminiscent of children's TV, but soon changes, including spooky haunting tracks and almost orchestral fanfares and themes. The graphics are simple, but really well designed, with smart sprites and lovely backgrounds." – *Computer and Video Games* (December 1991)



Insider Insight:
Years after my dad and I imported *Jerry Boy*, we were appalled to discover its American counterpart, *SmartBall*, an egregious example of a butchered localization. This Game Freak-developed misfit was a much better game in its original Japanese release. The American version left out the game's melancholy story, featuring a human character turned into a slime via the magic of an evil wizard. It also left out the towns and the game's NPCs (non-playable characters), which rounded out the gameplay and made it stand out in a sea of platformers. If I had never played *Jerry Boy* I might view *SmartBall* as an average platformer, but having owned its Super Famicom counterpart since 1992, I know how good it could have been. – Tyler Esposito

Snow White in Happily Ever After

Publisher: American Softworks.
Developer: Imagitec Design.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Snow White in Happily Ever After is based on the 1993 animated film *Happily Ever After*, an unofficial *Snow White* sequel produced by Filmation, the company responsible for such low budget, but fondly remembered cartoons as *The Batman/Superman Hour*, *Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids*, and *He-Man and the Masters of the Universe*. After the Evil Queen's death, her brother, Lord Maliss—who can change into a dragon—turns the Prince into Shadow Man. To free the kingdom from Maliss's evil magic, you, as Snow White or Shadow Man, must conquer eight levels that are selectable from the beginning: The Forest, Cloud Land, Mother Nature, Realm of Doom, Crystal Caves, Mud River, The Courtyard, and Maliss, which has you battling the evil being in his ultimate dragon form.

In this cartoonish platformer, you collect fruit and coins and jump on and throw apples (including apple bombs) at such enemies as birds, bees, devils, worms, and sunflowers. Apples can also be used to eliminate blocks, and you can find hidden blocks (á la *Super Mario Bros.*) by jumping. Certain blocks have springs that let you jump higher. Bumping into an enemy, falling into a pit, and falling from too high will reduce your health—when it gets to zero, you lose a life. In one auto-scrolling stage you will float on a log. The game also includes warp zones, mid-stage flag save points, and hidden bonus areas. In each level a "Find the Exit" sign will eventually appear, letting you proceed to the next area. *Snow White in Happily Ever After* is *not* a Disney property, and it shows—the graphics are merely adequate, as is the gameplay.

Fun Fact: When *Snow White in Happily Ever After* was released in theaters *Entertainment Weekly* gave the film an F, saying it "may star the fairest of them all, but the new cartoon feature *Happily Ever After* is one ugly piece of marketing opportunism."

Fun Fact: Magazines from the early 1990s mentioned a *Snow White in Happily Ever After* game coming to the NES, but it was never officially released; instead gamers got the SNES version. In 2016, a ROM of the NES game surfaced. It is much different than the SNES cartridge.

Notable Quotable:
"Good options including a controller setup, which is important since the default setup is very awkward . . . Poor animation using a minimum of frames. Not terribly challenging." – *Nintendo Power* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"The exits aren't always that obvious to spot . . . There are so many things to pick up and cross it's not really clear what you're meant to prioritize . . . hearts are all you really need to worry about since they extend your play . . . After playing the game countless times, I HATE Snow White. If she stands too close to the edge of a mushroom or whatever, she doesn't work with it like Sonic, no: she drops. And when she drops, it's on her butt, and this is usually followed by annoying swarms of chirping stars quickly hovering above her head like it's a *Tom & Jerry* cartoon . . . her jumping sucks . . . The music is pretty random but strangely awesome. It's repetitive and relentless, but it's got that type of fast-paced rhythm and folk-style melody which almost makes you want to river-dance your way through the game. Where it all falls apart for me is in the gameplay . . . It's just annoying after a while trying to concentrate on getting awkward jumps right when you're not sure where you're going." – Adam Ezagouri (1morecastle.com)

Soldiers of Fortune

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte.
Developer: Bitmap Brothers.
Game Type: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A console rendition of *The Chaos Engine* for the Commodore Amiga, *Soldiers of Fortune*—which was also released for the Genesis—lets one or two players select from six upgradeable characters: Thug, Mercenary, Scientist (replacing Preacher from the original computer version), Gentleman, Navvie, or Brigand. Each character varies according to power, health, speed, wisdom, weaponry (pistol, rifle, cannon, ray gun, Gatling gun, shotgun, molotov, dynamite) and usage of special items (map, bombs, Molotov cocktails, freeze, repel, dynamite, first aid, landmines, shields, etc.)

At the startup screen you begin with a set amount of money, and you must hire the player you control and the computer player. As you run from area to area collecting gold, shooting bad guys and creatures (some of which pop up out of seemingly nowhere), and grabbing keys (which open new pathways) and weapon power-ups, the AI character follows along and does the same. In two-player mode a second gamer joins you in combat. There are puzzles to solve, bridges to cross, secret rooms to find, mazes to walk through, multiple routes to navigate, peace signs that act as save points, telephones that transport you to different areas, projectiles and electric shocks to avoid, stairs to climb, and health items that look like soda cans. The action takes place in sixteen levels spread over four cyberpunk worlds. You can shoot in eight directions. Fans of *Gauntlet*, *Ikari Warriors*, and *Super Smash T.V.* should enjoy *Soldiers of Fortune*. *The Chaos Engine 2* followed on the Amiga in 1996.

Notable Quotable:

"This game doesn't just sort the men from the boys—it sorts the men from the biologically engineered superpeople required to play the damn thing! To say that *Solider of Fortune* is tough is an insult to the game. Outrageously-chuck-the-pad-at-the-screen-damn-nigh-impossible is nearer the mark. If this was simply the case on later levels it might be a good thing, but right from the word go you're lobbed in at the deep end and definitely up the proverbial creek without a paddle. The programmers of this conversion have obviously had a challenge overload ('Let's make it so hard we can't even play it 'cos then it's bound to be good') and the result is a game that's so rock it's a crock." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Each of the four worlds looks pretty different and has a decent amount of life instilled in it, like the bubbling mud in World 1's pits to the busted steam pipes and flickering lights

in the seemingly abandoned buildings in World 2. Each of the six mercenaries you choose from looks distinguished and gritty . . . The variety of enemies is not overly impressive . . . The sound is okay, but is lacking. While each stage has different background themes, the music is fairly repetitive, only slightly changing in pitch as you approach the end or midway point of the level. No variety of sound effects, either . . . While *Soldiers of Fortune* isn't quite the polished game I remember, it's still a pretty cool action-packed title that was a fairly impressive port of a PC title." – Somewhere in the Midst of Nowhere (somewhereinthemidstofnowhere.wordpress.com)

Sonic Blast Man

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: I.T.L.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Although it shares the name of Taito's 1990 arcade game, *Sonic Blast Man* for the Super Nintendo is much different than its coin-op counterpart, which offers a unique fighting system where players don actual boxing gloves to hit a mechanical punch pad. Gameplay in the home version is of the *Final Fight* variety. The titular superhero—referred to as a "hero of justice" in the opening text crawl—walks, jumps, punches, and kicks his way through street gangs, aliens, robots, terrorists, and other bad guys, including bosses. Environments to battle through include a ghost town, a weapons factory, sewers, a castle, and a space station.

Sonic can do normal punches, flip kicks, power punches (after you grab an enemy), and one-handed throws. After hitting an enemy with three normal punches you can unleash a sonic uppercut, a judo throw, or a wind-up punch. After hitting an enemy with a sonic uppercut you can do an airplane throw. Other moves include dynamite punch, which affects all on-screen enemies; and screw bomb, where you spin wildly and collide with surrounding enemies, knocking them off the screen. You can also grab helpful items after defeating enemies and by smashing objects (such as barrels). Apples, hamburgers, and chicken recover your power while super gloves increase the number of your dynamite punches. Sonic helmets grant extra lives while money bags increase your score.

As a nod to the arcade game, there are bonus rounds where you will punch enemies from a first-person perspective. Instead of using boxing gloves like in the coin-op, you will of course employ the standard SNES controller. While the SNES sequel to *Sonic Blast Man* is given the predictable title *Sonic Blast Man II*, the arcade version's sequel is called *Real Puncher*. Another arcade sequel followed called *Sonic Blast Heroes*.

Fun Fact: As with the US localization of *Final Fight* for the SNES, female enemies in *Sonic Blast Man* were replaced by males to appease Nintendo of America's "family friendly" policies.

Notable Quotable:

"*Sonic Blast Man* is my jam! It has an extremely technical, difficult, satisfying, and unique combat engine. The enemies are varied and get progressively weirder. The sprites are huge, the pixel art is excellent, and the music is pure Zuntata goodness. This is the best single-player brawler ever made." – PunchPedia (www.punchpedia.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay is just so slow . . . you have to beat way too many dudes before you can move on . . . at least you attack quickly, and you have different finisher punches depending on how you press the directional pad . . . Unlike *Final Fight*, Sonic Blast Man can't pick up any cool weapons to bludgeon or stab people with; because of that, the gameplay feels super stale quickly . . . The sequel is way better." – ProJared (YouTube)

Insider Insight:
My first memory of playing *Sonic Blast Man* was with my brother, so prior to writing this I consulted with him. After a few minutes on the phone the topic changed to other, more entertaining games and how we would finish many of them on Christmas day or New Year's Eve. Regardless of the system—the Commodore 64 up through the NES, TurboGrafx, Amiga, and into the SNES years—we always seemed to compete on the hardest games during those holidays.

The conversation switched back to *Sonic Blast Man* and how it played well, looked great, and had decent music. However, we recalled how the levels were painfully long, taking more than ten minutes to beat. It is nice that the programmers wanted to extend the enjoyment of the game, but unfortunately, about five minutes into each level my brother and I would lose interest, as we became aware that you are fighting the same two or three enemy types over and over again while listening to the music looping over and over until it became annoying.

If the programmers had shortened the levels to a more playable duration, or simply sped up the movement of the players and enemies to allow the game to flow faster, it would probably rank higher on my list of SNES games. The fighting system and super moves are excellent, and the action has a solid feel that was not always captured on other SNES beat-'em-ups.

As an indie programmer, I think about this game occasionally as I build out levels in the games I am working on. It serves as a reminder that it is not worth stretching the experience if it is going to force the player to slug through long, monotonous areas that are more of a chore to play than fun. – Russ Kumro

Sonic Blast Man II

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: I.T.L.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

This SNES exclusive sequel (there is no arcade version) to *Sonic Blast Man* adds two playable characters for a total of three, and now you can team up with another player. The title character, Sonic Blast Man, is well-rounded, capable of unleashing jabs, frenzy punches, grab-and-throws, shoulder attacks, dashing uppercuts, spiral flashes, fireballs, and more. Captain Choyear, who is slower and has shorter range, unleashes such attacks as triple punches, vertical jumping punches, spread thunderballs, heading and kicking, electric arc punches, and thunder strikes. Sonia is the fastest and has the most powerful special attack, the flare burst. She can also execute quintuple attacks, flame crescent kicks, diving flame kicks, and horizontal flare bursts.

The heroes—who are smaller than the protagonist in the first *Sonic Blast Man*—must work their way through five stages: Outside the Entrance to the Main Defense Center, Intercept the Transport Plane and Rescue the Pilot!, Protect "S" from the Alien Horde!, Breach the Barriers and Shut Down the Secret Jungle Base!, and No More Mr. Nice Guy! I'll Show You Who's the Toughest! Enemies you will face include alien troopers, elites, shields, fighters, gunners, exploders, jumpers, grapplers, claws, and imposters (which are your clones). There are also bosses to beat: Nunchuka Man, Bomber Man, Big Mutant, T-Rex, Floating Whip Master, Transform Man, Heavy Blast Man, and Yafu.

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay was sped up a lot in this one. You move faster, attack faster, you can dash and do a dodge roll. There's also a heavy attack now you can use with combos and grapples. Remember that d-punch attack from the first game? Well, it's back, only now you can power-up a normal attack to throw energy, fire-kick, or zappy hand. Or you can use more energy to do the screen-clearing attack. You're fighting alien invaders this time which means there are more enemy types . . . The character designs [of the three playable heroes] are stupid, like Saturday morning cartoon characters created specifically to sell toys, only to never get a cartoon or toys." – ProJared (YouTube).

Notable Quotable:

"Co-op support, so desperately needed in the first game, has been added at the sacrifice of sprite size. It's a fair trade. The enemy has shifted, and it's now all alien cyborg types, a change from the drug addicts and groupies of the original. This is where all the trouble lies. Some of these foes are just flat-out cheap, including the exploding robot monkeys . . . It's nearly impossible to hit them without causing damage to yourself while others hop around the screen to avoid being hit . . . To combat these cheap tactics, a decent array of moves is available . . . A quick knock down move is available to all characters, and in a pleasant

change of pace from other genre games, it doesn't require a sacrifice of health . . . That classic over-shaded look that so many SNES games excelled at is present, showing off extreme color that's easy on the eyes. Enemy combatants are less detailed for the most part, but the bosses copy the style the game is going for just fine. Animation is fair even if it won't win any awards. Flicker is completely non-existent, a major improvement. Sound effects are standard fare and you won't really feel each hit. There's not a lot of punch behind these punches. The music on the other hand is great . . . This one is worth a play if you can track it down . . . it's a major improvement on the first game." – Matt Poprocki (www.digitpress.com)

SOS

Publisher: Vic Tokai.
Developer: Human Entertainment.
Game Type: Action/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Borrowing a page (so to speak) from Paul Gallico's 1969 novel *The Poseidon Adventure*, which was made into a beloved disaster movie in 1972, *SOS* features a capsized luxury ship (complete with upside down toilets) that must be evacuated. Gamers select one of four different characters to control: an architect, a counselor, a sailor, and a doctor, each of whom talks to various characters, rescues survivors, and tries to find the escape hatch within the allotted time of sixty minutes. Each playable character handles the same, but has a different story, such as the architect, who needs to find his ailing sister; and the doctor, who searches for his missing wife.

You guide your character from a third-person viewpoint as he runs, jumps, crouches, swims, climbs ladders and walls, and more. Leading survivors past obstacles and hazards is a challenge, thanks in part to their ineptitude (they follow you, but will sometimes get stuck or fall to their death), and to the tilting, turning, slanting ship, which moves smoothly and dizzyingly via Mode 7 effects. Plus, there are doors that are locked or blocked from the outside, meaning you must find alternate routes.

When you encounter other passengers you can give them basic orders, or you can simply ignore them and try to escape by yourself. To get the best ending for each character you must rescue a specific passenger. There is no combat to speak of, but you can get hurt by fire, steam, falling from too great a height, and drowning. Known as *Septentrion* in Japan, *SOS* is not to be confused with the similarly titled SNES game, *Sink or Swim*.

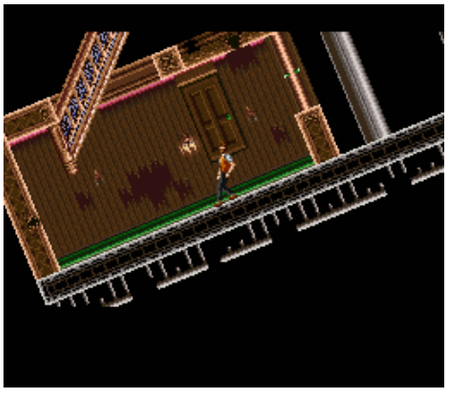
Fun Fact: In the Japanese version of the game the credits list the "actors" from the game with parody names like Kein Casnner, Chack Norris, William Dahoe, Michael Kain, Brock Shields, and Bill Muroni. Also the counselor is a pastor.

Notable Quotable:

"The premise behind *SOS* is great: Your hero has a compelling mission of goodwill and faces serious obstacles, all intensified by a race against the clock. Unfortunately, there are simply too many holes in *SOS*'s layout. I had hoped for some smooth sailing, but the vehicle is on too much water to stay afloat." – *GamePro* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*SOS* draws a lot from *Prince of Persia* (the time limit, the basics of the control scheme), but also has elements more similar to Human's later Super Famicom title *Clock Tower* (the branching paths and multiple endings) . . . It takes a little time to get adjusted to the controls, which are less sluggish than *Prince of Persia*, but still a bit awkward . . . They mostly work fine when the ship is perfectly level, but it's substantially more difficult when the whole area turns at a 45-degree angle . . . .In the late segments, *SOS* sticks its middle finger up at you, with a number of extremely aggravating platform challenges set in the ship's boiler room." – Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



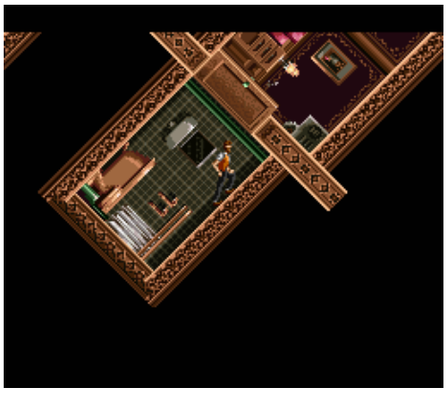
SOS

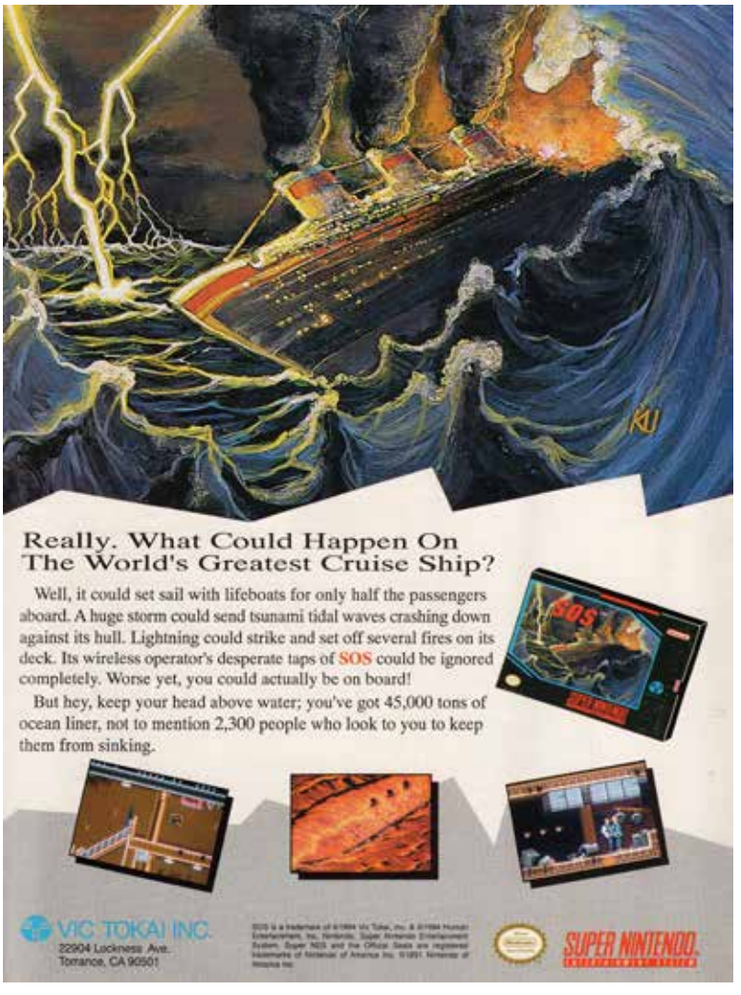
Insider Insight: Growing up, I had a hard time identifying my favorite movie. Depending on whatever mood I was in my choice seemed to change day to day. My picks ranged from *Beauty and the Beast* to *South Park: Bigger, Longer, and Uncut* (the two are basically identical). Picking just one seemed about impossible. As I got older one movie in particular stood out above the rest, and I can now confidently claim it as my all-time favorite: the 1972 disaster film *The Poseidon Adventure*. In this movie the SS *Poseidon*—a cruise ship en route to Greece—is struck by a rogue wave on New Year's Eve. The ship is turned upside down, and as a result the survivors have to make their way up through the ship so they can be rescued. Its campy but sincere dialogue, impressive special effects, amazing performances, creative concept, and message of hope and teamwork are just a few of the reasons why the film is far and away my favorite.

With this I have collected books, posters, and soundtracks of the movie over the years. And despite my obsession, for the longest time I was completely unaware of the Super Nintendo game *SOS*, which is heavily influenced by *The Poseidon Adventure*. As I researched it online I could not believe what I was reading. Other than names, the gist of the game is fairly identical to the movie. No matter the cost, I had to get a copy.

Well, $60 later (thanks, Game X Change) I had the cartridge, and I finally got to play it. And to say the least, it is different. I will not call it a masterpiece, but I certainly won't label it a bad game either. The controls are stiff, yes, but the atmosphere is chilling, your characters have a lot of freedom, there are multiple endings, and my favorite part: it is so similar to *The Poseidon Adventure*!

It is such an odd, rarely discussed game, but wow is it cool and unique. And even a little ahead of its time. There was only so much the game designers could do with a concept like this, and it shows. I do not say this often, but I would love to see a new version of this game with modern graphics, a more complex story, a bigger ship, and better controls. Wishful thinking, I know. For now, I guess I will have to keep enjoying this quirky little game that continues fading into obscurity. – Ryan Weiss





Soul Blazer

Publisher: Enix.
Developer: Quintet.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Soul Blazer has you guiding a swordsman (who you name) through six complex (if relatively short), multi-tiered stages: Grass Valley, GreenWood, St. Elles (an undersea mermaid town), Home of the Mountain Spirit, Dr. Leo's Laboratory, and Magridd Castle, the fortress of the tyrant King Magridd. Your job is to save the Freil Empire, including freeing the kingdom's captive souls, teaching the king about integrity, rescuing a beautiful maiden, and liberating an imprisoned inventor.

Using your blade and magic, you battle demons, ghosts, tanks, toy soldiers, water monsters, and other enemies in real time. Defeating enemies opens passageways, reveals treasure chests (containing useful items), brings forth spirits (which may provide experience, items, and information that will help you complete your mission), and reveals monster lairs (allowing you to free the souls being held captive). If you defeat the boss in an area peace will return to that town. As you progress through the game you will gain experience. As you reach each new level your HP, physical strength, defense, and attack power will be refilled and increase.

The sword you wield is long and can be swung down and thrusted forward. Magic is useful for battling enemies you can't reach with the sword. Types of magic include flame ball, light arrow, magic flare, rotator (a ring of destructive light), spark bomb, flame pillar, tornado, and phoenix (a bird of fire's soul that dwells in your sword). Helpful items include armor, medical herbs (for recovering HP), dream rod (for conversing with sleeping creatures), strange bottle (which prevents the loss of gems that act as energy for using magic), and brown stone (which is necessary to travel to the next area). During your journey you will encounter a number of obstacles, such as mobile roads (which make it difficult to control your speed), fire traps, lava, ice roads (where you can't change direction), damage blocks (which contain splinters), and spear floors. Known as *Soul Blader* in Japan. Followed by *Illusion of Gaia* and *Terranigma*; the latter was not released in the US.

Notable Quotable:

"*Soul Blazer* is another Enix masterpiece! This is a great way to follow *ActRaiser*, with a near-perfect action/RPG that you won't want to stop playing from start to finish. Even though I'm not into RPGs, this one held my interest. It has enough to offer for even the most hardcore action players." – *GameFan Magazine* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"*Soul Blazer* actually does live up to its ads of being the best cross between *Zelda* and *ActRaiser*. I was impressed with the graphic detail put into this game. Not a slow moment—mentally or physically—in this game. The music was soothing, not annoying like so many RPGs are. The only disappointment was your inability to skip messages. If you accidentally click on a character a second time, you must wait through the entire message a second time. Tedious. Other than that, no faults to speak of." – *Game Zero* (November 1992)

Space Ace

Publisher: Absolute Entertainment.
Developer: Oxford Digital Enterprises.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

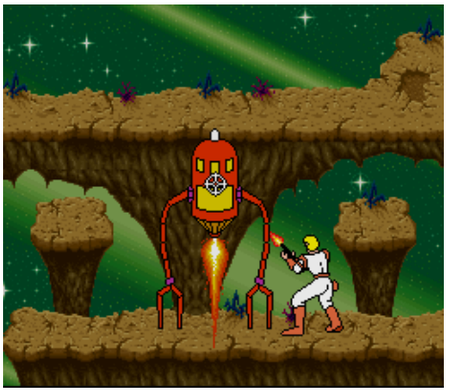
The sequel to Cinematronics' laser disc classic, *Dragon's Lair* (1983), the original arcade version of *Space Ace* (1984) featured the same type of limited, fully animated, trial-and-error gameplay, but changed the setting from fantasy to science fiction and armed the protagonist with a laser gun (which he seldom uses) instead of a sword. The SNES version features animations and levels based on the coin-op game, but the player controls Dexter (who can transform into the more powerful Ace) fully in real time, instead of making timed button presses at key points.

The game has forced scrolling and one-hit deaths, platform jumps are frequently hard to time, controls are dodgy, there are no checkpoints, and lasers can be difficult to avoid (as with the coin-op game, memorization helps), making for a not-fun, frustrating experience. Most of the action consists of jumping over chasms and dodging alien attacks, but you will also fire your laser gun.

In addition to platforming levels, which comprise most of the game, there are top-down space mazes where you fly through a rotating maze, destroying asteroids along the way. In addition, you will guide a flying saucer through a power tube, use rocket skates to steer through a maze, zoom through a motorcycle maze with wheelies and ramps, and traverse an underwater cavern. Many levels contain secret areas. The goal is to rescue the lovely Kimmy and save Earth, but few will make it that far. At least the music has dramatic flair.

Notable Quotable:
"The box indicates '14 levels of Laser Lunacy' and most people that play this version would agree on the lunacy. This game is quite difficult and unforgiving. If you think the timing in the arcade version is difficult, you'll find that a walk in the park after playing this game." – Syd Bolton (*Collecting for Dragon's Lair and Space Ace*)

Notable Quotable:
"If *Space Ace* seems a little hard at first, start studying the patterns of the screen—they never change. That's one of the problems of the game, actually. Another is that the levels are way too short. It's a great-looking game, but you'll probably be left hungry for more." – *Game Players* (June 1994)



Insider Insight:
Always a fan of Don Bluth's animation style, I hoped and prayed that Absolute Entertainment would treat the intellectual property *Space Ace* with respect. I knew that the Super Nintendo could never pull off the arcade laserdisc original, but I was hoping to all heaven for a decent facsimile.

To my horror, this game was worse than I could have imagined. While it did stay fairly faithful to the tale told in the arcade, the graphics paled in comparison to even standard SNES fare, and the animated sprites were clumsy and inept. Combined with one-hit deaths, a bad scrolling camera, horrible hit detection, and a weird isometric perspective for a side-scroller, the combination made for a wrecked game that was barely playable. In fact, this is the only game I have ever played that resulted in a broken controller! I am sad to admit that its "no mercy" attitude toward the player resulted in getting the better of me as I launched my control pad across the room. That is saying a lot, as I rarely lose my temper or lash out in a physical manner. In the end I was rooting for Borf!
– Michael Thomasson

Space Football: One on One

Publisher: Triffix Entertainment.
Developer: Bits Studio.
Game Type: Sports/Futuristic, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Bearing a much closer resemblance to games like *Faceball 2000* and *Ballblazer* than actual football or soccer, *Space Football* pits one Retro Grav hovercraft against another in a futuristic sport where players fight to control a hoverball to score touchdowns. Viewing the otherworldly action from a first-person perspective, you drive your hovercraft around the field, chasing the constantly moving ball. Once you grab it, you have just four seconds to carry it to your robot warrior opponent's goal. After four seconds it will automatically blast away from you.

Your hovercraft can accelerate and go in reverse, and you can turn right and left on the rotating (via Mode 7 scrolling) playfield. The shoulder buttons let you make sharper turns. Playfields are dotted with a variety of obstacles, including magnetic flux fields that drain your energy and spin cycles that twist you out of control, making the game a challenge. When your opponent has the ball, you can try to knock it away from him or her. There are twelve different drivers to choose from, and the game has thirty-two levels. A timer ticks down as you play.

Notable Quotable:

"The game felt like a chore to play. I spent most of my time trying to figure out where the ball was, and when I did, it was usually way too far from the goal to score once I got it. I felt like this game was more of a fetch quest than a sports title. What's sad is this game tried to copy *Ballblazer*, which came out years earlier and was much more enjoyable to play. *Ballblazer* keeps things simple and fun whereas *Space Football* removes the smooth gameplay and the fun with it. Even the Atari 7800 version of *Ballblazer* is a much better game." – The No Swear Gamer (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The space football roams around the map in an unpredictable pattern and is difficult to track down and grab. It's basically the snitch from the Harry Potter wizard sport Quidditch. The space cars can only hold the ball for a few seconds before having to let go of it, which is something I liked. There was a risk/reward calculation I had to do before running over the ball. Am I close enough to my goal to get the ball in? If I don't pick it up will it go toward my goal or my opponent's? This could be neat if the game didn't look like garbage . . . Sprites flicker in an obnoxious way, and the ball will sometimes disappear from the sides of the screen when you're trying to intercept it." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Space Invaders

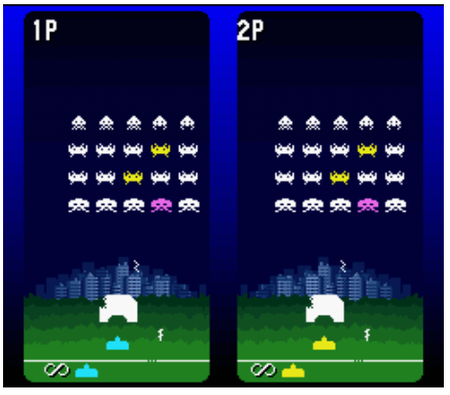
Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Taito.
Game Type: Slide-and-Shoot, 1–2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Space Invaders for the Super Nintendo does a predictably excellent job of recreating four different versions of the legendary 1978 arcade classic, which is a slowly paced game that nevertheless remains a lot of fun. Reproduced in all their glory are the upright cabinet screen version, the one in Black & White, the Black & White with Cellophane version, and the one in Color. These four modes of play are essentially the same game, but it is cool that all of them were included in this package. The manual suggests that you select the one that "reminds you of the first time you played, or possibly even the one on which you 'owned' the high score."

As most know, the game has you guiding a laser base left and right along the bottom of the screen, firing upward at descending columns of alien invaders that march in unison. As the invaders reach the sides of the screen they come down a row, and you must destroy all of them before they reach the bottom; menacing sound effects increase their pace as the action wears on. A row of four barriers sits just above your ship, and you can hide behind and shoot through them. Enemy fire will also eat away at the barriers. From time to time, a large mystery ship will fly across the top of the screen, and if you nail it with a well-timed shot you will get extra points. The game is all about timed shots and dodging enemy fire. A good strategy is to destroy vertical rows on the edges so the invaders have further to travel across the screen before they descend a row.

What sets this cartridge apart from the arcade game and the various home versions is a special VS Game Mode, which is a fun, competitive, strategic, split-screen contest that borrows a page from such two-player puzzle games as *Tetris 2* and *Dr. Mario*. Each time you destroy a complete row of invaders, that row will be sent to your opponent's side. Shooting invaders of different colors affects the game in a number of ways. Green clears that row of any remaining invaders. Blue drops your opponent's invaders one row. Yellow drops the invaders on your side one row. Red drops each side's invaders two levels. Pink randomly has the effect of you shooting green, blue, yellow, or red. The first player to shoot down all of the invaders on his side wins, but if a player depletes all of his ship stock, he loses. The latter rule does not apply when ship stock is set to infinity. Prior to beginning the game, each player can select their own difficulty level and number of ships, meaning you can handicap matches. The original Game Boy is also home to a near-perfect *Space Invaders* port, but without the addition of split-screen action.

Memories: My first memory of playing the original *Space Invaders* was at one of those little corner arcades that popped up in small towns all over America during the video craze of the late 1970s. Said town was McGregor, Texas (outside Waco), where we were on a trip to visit our extended family



on my father's side. I think my older cousin drove my brother and me to the arcade, but all I can really remember about that day was being mesmerized by rows of alien invaders slowly and terrifyingly working their way down the screen toward my lone ship, getting faster as they got lower, with scary heartbeat sound effects to match. I had played *Pong*, *Breakout*, and *Gun Fight* by this point, along with a variety of other arcade cabs, but there was nothing else even remotely as daunting or as exciting as *Space Invaders* when it stormed the country in 1978. Needless to say the game stole all my quarters, along with my rapidly beating heart. When *Space Invaders* dropped on the SNES, I was happy to play an arcade-perfect port at home, since versions for the Atari 2600 and 5200, while fun, had their differences, such as fewer invaders.

Notable Quotable:

"If you were hooked back in 1978, you may get hooked again. Fans like it. Everyone else will find it simple and repetitive, but challenging. I was never a huge fan of the original and this is just that and nothing more." – *Nintendo Power* (October 1997)

Notable Quotable:

"In case you were wondering if this is a reinvention of the classic arcade game with snazzy graphics, music, and gameplay tweaks such as *Galaga '90*, let's be clear, it isn't! This is the same old *Space Invaders* from three decades ago. Now this may not be such a bad thing for those with rose-tinted specs firmly in place. After all, the original game can still be fun; yes it is slow paced by today's standards but there is nothing fundamentally wrong with it. Sure, some may extract a sense of nostalgic bliss from this game, but most others will be left questioning why they wasted 800 precious Wii points on something so outdated . . . Taito had the chance to reinvent their classic franchise and took the easy way out instead. What may have been great back in 1978 really shows its age now with its comparatively slow and repetitive gameplay. If you want to enjoy *Space Invaders* nowadays, do yourself a favor and track down *Space Invaders Extreme* on the DS or PSP; this up-to-date remake retains everything good about the original and mixes it up with modern shoot-em-up elements to make for a far superior game." – Darren Calvert (www.nintendolife.com), reviewing the game downloaded to the Wii via the Wii Shop Channel.

Insider Insight:

Space Invaders landed on the Super Nintendo sixteen years after invading Earth arcades in 1978. Despite being more than a decade and a half late, it was not a reinvention of the classic arcade game, and I was just fine with that.

Space Invaders was the first video game I ever played. With my older brother and sister, I pedaled on my banana-seated bicycle across streets that I was forbidden by my parents to cross to the local Dairy Queen. On that hot summer day I had a pocket full of quarters to buy a Mr. Misty, the franchise's branded slushy drink at the time. Upon walking into the restaurant, I witnessed a spectacle new to my young eyes—my first coin-operated video game. Needless to say, I failed to get that icy refreshment and dropped all my quarters into *Space Invaders*.

A few years later, I would sit on the carpet in my best friend's basement playing *Space Invaders* on the Atari VCS. He only owned a few titles, and the thumping beat of the game kept our attention for years. My best buddy, Alan, was murdered with my other good friend, Tommy, just prior to *Space Invaders* being released on the Super Nintendo. I bought the game in homage to them both, and even today, before firing up a game of *Space Invaders*, I say a little prayer before blasting those alien aggressors. As I said, the Super Nintendo version of *Space Invaders* was the same as it always was, and I am just fine with that. – Michael Thomasson

Insider Insight:

I can still see the image of the local neighborhood bully, Billy "Bully" Ferguson, leaning his face into mine, Frito breath and all, as he gripped my left arm at the elbow, preventing me from walking away.

"I got the Atari finally," he said, smirking, squeezing my elbow tighter and more painfully as I tried to pry his hand off me. "*Space Invaders*, too. It's better than that stupid one you idiots play at the arcade, and it's free because I can play it at home in my room . . . by myself." Despite the crushing pain in my arm, I remembered feeling relieved to hear that he might find a reason to never come out into daylight again.

Now that Bully Ferguson had an "Atari," maybe he wouldn't hassle me and my friends at the arcade anymore. Maybe once in our lives we would be able to go there and not have to constantly look over our shoulder for that guy. Maybe he would just go away.

The year was 1980, and ol' Ferguson had finally convinced his parents to buy him an "Atari," but its version of *Space Invaders* was nowhere as good nor as satisfying as playing the arcade version, if you ask me—but I wasn't about to argue with him. Many console versions of *Space Invaders* would be released, but again, none ever appealed to me except the arcade version, so I never paid them any attention . . . that is, until the SNES version came out nearly twenty years later.

The SNES version got everything right—the sound, the cursor movements, and the addition of color—and not just any color, but color reminiscent of Universal's *Cosmic Monsters* clone, which made the game all that more enjoyable to look at.

Every time I see or play *Space Invaders* on the SNES, I think of Bully Ferguson and what he said that day about the Atari 2600 version. "It's better than that stupid one you idiots play at the arcade" No, it wasn't. And it is also not better than the SNES version.

There are only two versions of *Space Invaders* worth playing: one is the arcade upright and the other is on the SNES. – Catherine DeSpira

Space Megaforce

Publisher: Toho.
Developer: Compile.
Game Type: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Released as *Super Aleste* in Japan, *Space Megaforce* is a relatively obscure shooter that deserves a larger audience. Gameplay is fast and fun, with players—acting as a pilot for the Earth Allied Forces—flying a ship over twelve busy areas, including caves, rainforests, space stations, and asteroid fields. To destroy the many alien spacecraft you will encounter (including mech bosses), you will have access to eight different rapid fire weapons (including lasers, missiles, guided shots, and multi-directional shots), each of which has six power levels you can increase by grabbing floating power-ups. In addition to the forty-eight (!) firing modes, you can equip bombs that affect most everything on screen.

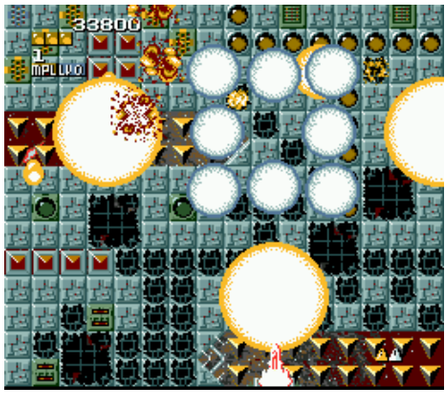
Unlike many shooters such as *Super R-Type*, walls and terrain are not deadly to the touch (though there are obstacles, such as gun emplacements that fire at you), and the game is slowdown-free. Everything here is fast paced, from the bullets and lasers you shoot, to the scrolling, to the enemy movement and firepower. The game takes advantage of the graphical power of the SNES with on-screen objects that shrink and enlarge. There are also Mode 7 rotation and digitized voice effects. You can select from three difficulty levels, and there is a Short Game option that acts as a score attack mode. *Space Megaforce* is part of the *Aleste* series, including such titles as *Robo Aleste* (*Dennin Aleste* in Japan) for the Sega CD and *Power Strike* (a localization of *Aleste*) for the Master System.

Notable Quotable:

"It's *Blazing Lazers*, only better . . . It's got more levels, more enemies, more weapons, and more effects than the game that I compare it to . . . *Space Megaforce* doesn't take itself too seriously with those voices, the oddly appealing keyboard music, and the relatively simplistic, though vibrant colors." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphically, this is one of the most impressive shooters for the Super NES. Everything from the individual alien attack ships to the animation of the ship's weapons is flawless . . . an incredible musical score . . . sound effects are equally impressive . . . The control is fluid and response is immediate . . . lots of powerful weapons . . . a phenomenal cartridge . . . a bit too easy for hardcore gamers . . . about as close to a perfect shooter as you can get." – *Electronic Games* (December 1992)



Notable Quotable:

"An incredible game . . . Graphics are superb with highly detailed sprites and awesome visual effects (the second level's space station is breathtaking!). Then the game follows all Compile's shooting traditions by the book—so be ready for a fast, intense, and breathtaking experience . . . The screen is always swarming with enemy ships and bullets, and the arsenal of upgradable weaponry at your disposal is probably the most destructive I have ever seen in a shooter . . . The game may not please all shooter fans, though, and the constant frenzied action may not suit everyone . . . some levels can also be quite long and repetitive . . . a gorgeous 'tour de force' and an unbelievable game. A brilliant masterpiece that deserves the 'SUPER' prefix, unlike [certain] others." – Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Insider Insight:

Compile made its share of amazing shooters back in the '90s and *Space Megaforce* is no exception. Heavily influenced by *GunHed*/*Blazing Lazers*, this Super NES title's furious gameplay and complex weapons system made it stand out from the rest. I remember importing *Super Aleste* from Japan months before the US version was available. I was so into the game when it first came out that some of my fellow editors were jokingly calling me "Martin Aleste." The US version was missing a few elements compared to the Japanese game, but that did not detract from the overall experience. If you happen to have a copy of this incredible shooter then my advice is to hang onto it, as prices have soared over the past few years due to its limited production run in the US. – Martin Alessi

Insider Insight:

Blowing stuff up is awesome, and it is the key ingredient to making a successful shooter. Combine that element with a catchy electronic soundtrack, and it makes me *love* blowing stuff up. In high school I had a friend who had a TurboGrafx-16, and we would take turns playing *Blazing Lazers* for hours. Fast forward to the SNES era—I found this hidden gem in the shooter genre, and it instantly took me back to those long evenings of obliterating aliens and space ships in *Blazing Lazers*. And for good reason: *Space Megaforce* was developed by the same developer, Compile. The game has plenty of power-ups to keep the game interesting while providing the player plenty of difficulty settings so you can adjust it to your skill level. The soundtrack is well-choreographed to the gameplay and explosions. I always turned up the volume all the way for maximum effect. – Delf Meek

Spanky's Quest

Publisher: Natsume.
Developer: Natsume.
Game Type: Vertical Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

To defeat the evil witch Morticia, Spanky—our monkey hero—must traverse six towers, each comprised of ten levels and a boss battle. Spanky has an unusual attack method, as he lobs a ball that will stun fruit enemies, such as Orangey, Melun, and Strawbee. What makes it unusual is that bouncing the ball off his head makes Spanky's attack more powerful. Bouncing it once turns the ball into a single baseball; twice, into five soccer balls that fall in arch formation; three times, into a volleyball that turns into four rotating volleyballs when it hits an enemy; and four times, into five basketballs that fan out horizontally for a wide attack.

The goal in each level is to gather all the keys. If a fruit monster is carrying a key, hitting the creature with a ball will release the key. You can also grab helpful items, such as a straw hat that slows Spanky down when falling and a feather hat that speeds him up and prevents him from slipping on slippery blocks. Stages include Ivy, Bridge, Beach, Underwater Towers, Palace of Gears, and The Witch's Tower, each of which has traps, such as an egg cannon and a gorilla statue that shoots fire. Some of the traps are operable by the player and the enemies.

A cute, richly cartoonish game with a nifty jazz soundtrack, *Spanky's Quest* has simple controls (A to jump, B to attack, d-pad to move) but inventive, entertaining, and fairly strategic gameplay. Passwords for saving progress make the challenge doable. Fans of *Bubble Bobble* should enjoy the game. Also released for the Game Boy. Known in Japan as *Monkey Reflections: The Adventures of Mr. Jiro*.

Notable Quotable:
"If you're a real platform freak this is worth a look, but for all the rest of you there are much better offerings available." – *N-Force* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"*Spanky's Quest* is probably best for people who don't mind putting some thought into their gameplay sessions. The game requires time management skills, timing, patience, observation, and practice. You might not like it if you just want to vegetate in front of the screen. [It] has similarities to another Super Nintendo game, *Out to Lunch*. However, *Spanky's Quest* is much more satisfying to play, and, putting nostalgia aside, still has the charm today that swayed me years ago." – SNES HUB (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Insider Insight:
During my Super Nintendo era I was a broke high school kid, renting games as often as I could. There was one title that looked like it was made for small children called *Spanky's Quest*. Being a high schooler, my friends and I would giggle at the name for its innuendo and tease the other guys about renting it. "Oh good! I'm glad *Spanky's Quest* is still here or I would've had to rent something good," my friends and I would say jokingly. Inevitably, I ran out of games I had not played.

One fateful night when I was flying solo, I glanced at the back of the box and figured it actually didn't look too bad, and maybe a little gaming that I did not need to use my brain on would be a nice change of pace. I nervously took it up to the rental counter, expecting to be judged by the young adult ringing me up. As it turned out he said, "I rented this a few weeks ago. It's actually kind of fun." He was right. Although the presentation and box art does make it look like a kid's game, it features a challenge that I could not believe. I almost felt a little ripped off, as I could have played it much sooner. Like those friends you have that make fun of pho without actually trying it, and once they do they are hooked. Goes to show you should never judge a video game by its box art. *Spanky's Quest* remains one of my favorite Super Nintendo games today. – John Riggs

Sparkster

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

In the quickly paced *Sparkster*—a true product of its time—players guide a running, jumping, slashing, flying (via rocket pack), attitudinal (in the Sonic the Hedgehog tradition), armored opossum through nine levels of play using a flame-shooting sword and various dash and spinning attacks to destroy robot snakes, wolf soldiers, gun turrets, and other creatures. Sparkster also floats in bubbles, rides elevators, crawls on ceilings, jumps on conveyor belts and moving platforms, and much more. And of course there are the typical spikes, lasers, enemy projectiles, and the like to dodge.

The levels are much different than those found in the six-level Genesis version (the controls, graphics, enemies, story, and music are also different), especially regarding a pair of SNES exclusives: Musical Town (level six), in which players battle such characters as a piano-playing robot; and Shooting (level seven), which introduces vertical scrolling shooter action. Other levels include Lakeside, Steel Works, Bird, Submarine, Pyramid, Fortress, and Missile Destruction. *Sparkster* is a sequel to (or, more accurately, a spinoff of) *Rocket Knight Adventures*, which was only released for the Genesis. Unlike *Rocket Knight Adventures*, there are no side-scrolling shooter levels in *Sparkster*.

Fun Fact: *Sparkster* was designed and programmed by Hideo Ueda, the main programmer of *Axelay*.

Notable Quotable:

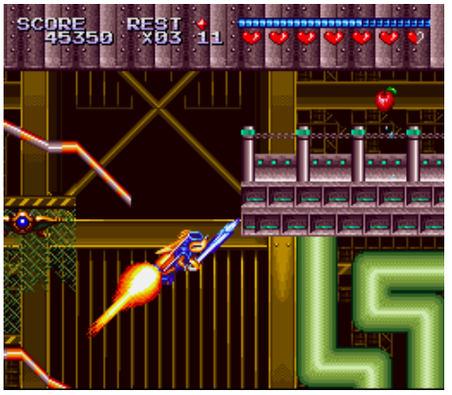
"*Sparkster* isn't as fresh as the original *Rocket Knight*. The play control should've been improved, and new weapons would've been nice. Still, *Rocket Knight* rookies will do well with *Sparkster* . . . Fun gameplay . . . lots of gameplay perks: multiple routes, hidden rooms, and terrain that varies with the difficulty level . . . Commendable graphics and sounds." – *GamePro* (November 1994)

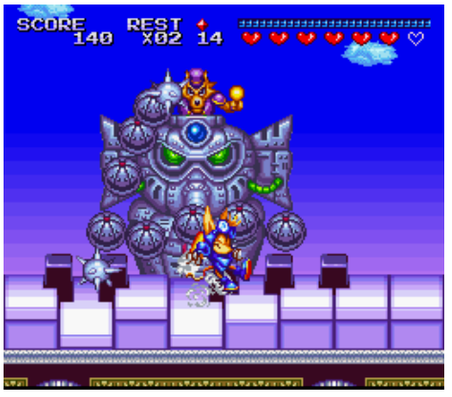
Notable Quotable:

"The best Konami game in recent months puts them back to form—this one has all the company's trademark elements: huge levels, gigantic bosses, outstanding graphics, and excellent music. There is plenty of technique to learn and you won't master this in one sitting. The shooter level is also a really nice touch and just adds to the variety." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994).

Notable Quotable:

"*Sparkster* definitely benefits from the graphical prowess of the SNES—Sparkster's sprite looks much cooler than before, and background graphics are full of brilliantly vibrant colors, even if they don't rely on any gimmicky effects. The music is fantastic, too, as Sparkster gets brand new 'theme' music, variations of which are played at various spots throughout the game. There's some annoying slowdown, but Sparkster still zooms with near unfathomable speed, negating any of those silly Sega 'blast processing' ads . . . Like *Rocket Knight Adventures* that preceded it, the SNES *Sparkster* is a completely fantastic game, and undoubtedly an overlooked classic." – Kurt Kalata (www.hardcoregaming101.net)





Spawn: The Video Game, Todd McFarlane's

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment/ Sony Electronic Publishing.
Developer: Ukiyotei Company.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Based on superstar artist Todd McFarlane's popular *Image* comic book series, which began in 1992, *Spawn* is a side-scrolling beat-'em-up in the mold of such games as *Final Fight* and *The Death and Return of Superman*. Players guide Al "Spawn" Simmons—a brutal anti-hero clad in black with a white mask and a red cape—as he walks along punching and kicking demons, thugs, goons, spiders, and other enemies, along with such bosses as Violator, Redeemer, Overkill, and Malebolgia. Spawn can also jump, duck, block, and pull off a number of special moves (which can be hard to execute thanks to clumsy controls), including fire blasts, burning fists, and teleportation. As with *Final Fight*, using special moves drains energy.

The game takes place in such hellish locations as streets, caves, a warehouse, an institute for the criminally insane, the Church of Evil, and Hall of the Pharaohs. In addition to combat, the game incorporates platforming, wall jumping, an upside down area, and more. The storyline revolves around a renegade Crusader, The Mad One, who has kidnapped thirteen children and captured their innocence within an Orb of Purity.

Spawn: The Video Game looks good (although platforms are obscured at times), doing the comic book proud, but gameplay is uneven at best and frequently frustrating. The title anti-hero also starred in *Spawn* (Game Boy Color), *Spawn: The Eternal* (PlayStation), *Spawn: In the Demon's Hand* (arcade, Dreamcast), and *Spawn: Armageddon* (GameCube, PlayStation 2, Xbox).

Notable Quotable:

"*Spawn* is too similar to any other *Final Fight*-type games. The differing attack buttons with both weak and strong punches and kicks are a good idea, but all that is needed is the typical jump-and-kick motion to progress through the game. *Spawn* should give gamers more than one life instead of constantly having to go to the continue screen. The game is good for dedicated comic book fans, but those who are sick of *Final Fight* games, pass this one up." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"It has become harder and harder to take seriously any and all games that are artificially hard (you know, instead of being difficult by ingenious level design and/or item placement, it cheats you with enemies and bosses that take 150 million hits to kill). Spawn has fantastic music, well-drawn graphics, gallons of different moves and actions, but the experience as a whole leaves a rancid taste in your mouth because of its annoying 'artificial difficulty.' *Spawn*, a good game that should've been even better. Shame." – *GameFan Magazine* (January 1996)

Insider Insight:
In the '90s, classic superheroes such as Spider-Man and Batman became painfully uncool next to edgier, more violent heroes like *Spawn*—especially to young teenagers like me. This was perhaps at its most prominent in 1997, the so-called "Year of Spawn." It was then that Todd McFarlane's young creation was featured in an HBO animated series (that still holds up today), a live-action feature film, and a video game for the PlayStation.

As I was a Nintendo kid through and through, I did not have a PlayStation (though I did have a Nintendo 64), so to get my *Spawn* fix, I had to track down the SNES game. The only store that had a copy of *Spawn* was Marie's Video, a half hour from where I lived—not exactly somewhere I could ride my bike to at thirteen. Because I was a bit of a loner, my parents were always more than happy to drive me to out-of-the-way rental stores to support my gaming habits, even though it ate away at their time on the weekends. It is something to this day that I am grateful for, as not only did it allow me to play games I otherwise could not have, but it taught me what it meant to be unselfish and to put others before myself.

I set my expectations of what the game would be low as it came from Acclaim, the company that kick-started many people's dread of licensed games, despite publishing *Maximum Carnage* and *Judge Dredd*. To my pleasant surprise, I enjoyed *Todd McFarlane's Spawn: The Video Game* quite a bit. While nothing spectacular, it featured gorgeous sprites, moody music, creative bosses, and a sound understanding of the license. A few years ago I found out why this stood out from Acclaim's usual shovelware. Instead of being farmed out to the highest bidder, it was created by a Japanese developer named Ukiyotei, who made the well-regarded *SkyBlazer*, which is similar to *Spawn*.

Sometimes you reflect back upon a game and say, "I loved that back in the day." In the case of *Spawn*, his first game holds up better than many of the comics that inspired it. – Blair Farrell

Spectre

Publisher: CyberSoft.
Developer: Synergistic Software.
Game Type: First-Person Tank Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Viewed from inside one of three different tanks—each of which is rated according to speed, shields, and ammo—*Spectre* takes place in a virtual Cyber-War world comprised of basic shapes, flat planes, and cool colors, including various shades of blue, green, and purple. Gameplay evokes the coin-op classic *Battlezone* (1980) to some degree, with players maneuvering their tank right, left, and forward, firing cannons and grenades at enemy tanks. The tank can also jump over mines and enemy fire. If you get desperate you can go into hyperspace (á la *Asteroids*), which teleports you to a different location.

The objective in each level is to collect four flags. A customizable tank is available—where you are given fifteen points to divide between speed, shields, and ammo—as are four two-player split-screen modes: Arena (earn points for each opponent you destroy), Allied Attack (capture flags guarded by robot tanks), Base Raid (capture your opponent's flag), and Flag Rally (capture flags before your opponent does). First released for the Macintosh in 1991, *Spectre* was followed by *Spectre Supreme* and *Spectre VR* for home computers. The game also spawned *Spectre 3D* (a.k.a. *Spectre: Cybertank Wars*) for the iPhone, iPod Touch, and iPad.

Notable Quotable:

"It might look rather basic from the screen shots, but you're missing the true beauty of the thing. A massively playable blast-fest, with more than a hint of that classic *Battlezone* style." – *Total!!* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Using a first-person perspective, you zip around and fire at targets. One major problem is you can take several hits before even getting the enemy in your sights." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a great rental game, especially if you've played *Spectre* on your Macintosh or PC before; it really screams on the Super NES. As far as shooter/simulator games go . . . well, there are better ones out there. It's cool that your spacecraft moves over a curved surface—and the two-player combat can be a lot of fun—but that's about the most interesting stuff in the game." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (June 1994)

Speed Racer: In My Most Dangerous Adventures

Publisher: Accolade.
Developer: Radical Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports Car Racing/ Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

As Speed Racer—the classic anime character—you drive the coolest car around, the Mach 5. Not only is it fast and sleekly designed, but it is equipped with a number of special features, including autojacks (jump over cars and hazards), turbo (extra burst of forward thrust), canopy (for underwater survival and protection from extreme temperatures), chopper blades (cut trees and signs, slash opponents' cars), and gripper tires (better traction for driving off the track or in sand). If you veer off the track, a gizmo bird will appear and get you back on course.

You view the action from behind the Mach 5, and a monitor along the bottom of the screen displays the odometer, tachometer, speedometer, and damage meter. To repair the car you can—depending on the track—exit to a pit stop so Sparky can make repairs or grab power-ups (shaped like wrenches) that appear along the roadway. There are six courses in all, including The Mythical Islands Tour and The Great Alpine Race. You can drive on the test track to practice your skills or go straight to the normal or hard mode. Races are against Speed's arch rivals, including Kabala, the Melange, Snake Oiler, the Car Acrobatic Team, and Captain Terror.

In addition to racing action, you will go on foot to such locations as The Streets of Cairo and The Temple of Kopetopek. During these scenes you will walk, climb, crouch, and punch and kick bad guys while trying to find Spridle and Chim Chim, rescue Trixie, or protect the Mach 5. To win the game, you must place in one of the top three positions in each race and complete all the off-track adventures. After you win as Speed Racer you can play as mysterious Racer X, who drives the Shooting Star.

In addition to being released as a standalone game, *Speed Racer: In My Most Dangerous Adventures* was also included on the hard-to-find *Exertainment Mountain Bike Rally/Speed Racer* combo cartridge, which you can read about in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*.

Notable Quotable:

"The tracks in *Speed Racer* are long, uneventful, and ugly—not even the inclusion of gadgets like wheel blades and autojacks spices things up enough to make this wreck worth playing. Go, Speed Racer. Just go." – *Game Informer Magazine* (July 2008)

Notable Quotable:

"Poor graphics and action on the side-scrolling levels hurt the overall look and feel of this cart, but the racing levels are second to none for challenging fun. If you're a fan of the cartoon series, this cart is definitely for you." – *GamePro* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The racing stages are kind of dull. They're super long and very tedious until you start trying out your saw blades on opponents. The platform-style stages fare a little better, because you can be Racer X and prance around in his snazzy outfit and kick bad guys around. A weird combination of game types which only partly succeeds." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The Speed Racer revival is proceeding apace, fueled by a new cartoon series, a videotape, MTV reruns of the original show, and now a video game. *Dangerous Adventures*' amazing racing scenes—featuring flying cars that sprout buzz saws—are snatched straight from the '60s show and are rendered in the same pastel-colored animation that made it a kitschy favorite." – *Entertainment Weekly* (June 1994)

Speedy Gonzales: Los Gatos Bandidos

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Sunsoft.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Criminal cat gang Los Gatos Bandidos has kidnapped all of Speedy Gonzales's mouse friends and hidden them in various parts of the Cat-Badlands country. Locations include Sleepy Rock, Surely Wood, Fiesta City, Ancient Keep, Snowy Cabins, Galactical Galaxies, and Ye Olde Bounty. You must help the fast Looney Tunes character retrieve his buddies from the felonious felines.

You begin each level with a certain number of mice to find. It is not necessary to find every single mouse, but doing so will net you bonus points and extra continues. As you run, jump, kick, and search your way through each of the seven levels of play you must avoid traps and fight bad guys, including end-of-level bosses and arch enemies from the cartoon show, such as Sylvester and Robocat. At various points in the game switches and buttons must be activated to open doors and turn off lasers.

To help you make it through the game, you can use mousetraps and other objects to bounce in the air and boots that provide an extra burst of speed. You will also fly while hanging on zip lines and after launching yourself from cannons. Pick-ups include cheese that gives you extra points and bonus lives; magic shoes that make you run faster; 1-ups that provide extra lives; hearts that give you extra energy; clocks that grant extra time; and Tabasco sauce that enables you to breathe fire on the Los Gatos Banditos. You begin *Speedy Gonzales: Los Gatos Bandidos* with three lives and three continues. After you beat a level you can repeat it as often as you like. Speedy also starred in *Speedy Gonzales* for the Game Boy and *Speedy Gonzales: Aztec Adventure* for the Game Boy Color.

Fun Fact: "The Fastest Mouse in all of Mexico" made his first official appearance in 1955, in a Friz Freleng-directed short called "Speedy Gonzalez." A prototype of the character first appeared in 1953, in a short called "Cat-Tails for Two."

Notable Quotable:

"This game rips off its play mechanics from a lot of others, most notably *Sonic*, but it doesn't pull any of it off very well. Play control ain't great—he might be 'The Fastest Mouse in all Mexico'—but he sure takes his time getting up to speed. The animation is stiff and none of the levels pose an interesting challenge . . . Worst of all, Speedy's signature 'Andale! Ariba!' sounds like it was done by a gerbil on helium." – *Game Players* (November 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The game was indeed supposed to bring some *Sonic*-style gaming to the Super Nintendo . . . The game had originally been in development by a small studio in England for about a year, but gameplay and level designs were not progressing at an acceptable rate and quality. So we brought Mick [Hanrahan], the lead artist, and Anthony Lloyd, the programmer, to California for about six months to finish the game under my direction and direct involvement . . . Most of the levels had to be scrapped or overhauled." – Former Sunsoft producer/director René Boutin (dromble.wordpress.com)

Insider Insight:
The days of the Super Nintendo were filled with various attempts at capturing the platforming magic of Mario. *Speedy Gonzales* is one such attempt to find that magic, but ends up as an average platformer that is more like a poor *Sonic the Hedgehog* clone. Granted, there are a certain number of mice to find in each stage, which can lead to slight replay value. Unfortunately, there is a lack of quality, as controlling the little mouse feels terrible and slippery. The sound design is also all over the place, with dull music and high-pitched sound effects. Add this to the shoddy hitboxes on boss fights and it really makes for a bad time.

Regardless, for some reason I loved this game as a child. I was never really into the cartoon, but I enjoyed going through all the stages, and it was simple enough that I did eventually beat the game. That was a cool moment, because there were few games that I had beaten at the time. Blasting that final boss with a flurry of mousey kicks felt awesome, and I got to brag to my cousin about it. Playing it now is painful, as the game is filled with leaps of faith and death traps and it never feels satisfying. – Alex McCumbers

Spider-Man

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Western Technologies.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Based on the Fox Kids *Spider-Man* animated series that ran from 1994–1998 (for a total of five seasons), this colorful game has you guiding a short, stocky Web-Head through six levels of play: The Lab at Empire State University, Construction Zone, Brooklyn Bridge, Coney Island, J. Johan Jameson's Penthouse, and Ravencroft insane asylum. To make his way forward and battle the enemies he will encounter—including thugs, robots, and such supervillains as Venom, the Vulture, Doctor Octopus, and the Green Goblin—Spidey can run, jump, kick (including spin kicks—the most effective weapon), punch, crawl, crouch, climb, swing from web lines, stick to surfaces, throw gas and stun grenades, and fire web bolts. Certain enemies fly and fire lasers or homing missiles. There are platforms to jump on and obstacles to avoid, including rifle shots, fire, electricity, and radioactive drips. At certain points Spidey can grab icons for use in calling on members of the Fantastic Four for help.

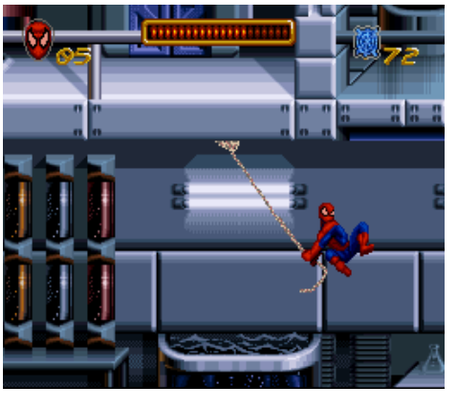
Spider-Man is similar to its Genesis counterpart, but has a separate button for running. The SNES game has superior music, while the Genesis version has darker, slightly more appealing graphics. When Spidey walks in the SNES game he gets annoyingly close to the edge of the screen, resulting in some cheap deaths. In the Genesis version he stays near the center.

Notable Quotable:

"Initially I didn't like this game, but after I played it for a while, I hate it! It was one of those games that while I was playing it I kept thinking, 'I've seen this in another game.' The sad thing is the other game was much better." – *Game Players* (May 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"In this game's kickass intro, Spider-Man swings around the city with a full moon looming in the background and a gargoyle in the foreground. Then you're treated to the Spider-Man theme song sung by some kind of freaky electronic voice. This game is great until you play it! The perplexing controls and non-intuitive design is infuriating. And what is the deal with Spider-Man's body? He's so bulky and top-heavy, it might as well be the Incredible Hulk in that costume . . . Spider-Man can crawl on ceilings, but apparently only in certain designated places . . . your web line never sticks to where you need it to . . . Why in the world do I need to jump first before I can shoot my web line or grab a wall? I felt bewildered playing this game, constantly wondering where I was supposed to go . . . *Spider-Man* has a lot of arbitrary rules, like not being able to kick in a mesh grate until you fight a robot in a different part of the stage . . . Except for a few nice skylines and sunsets, the scenery is lacking in detail and extremely repetitive." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



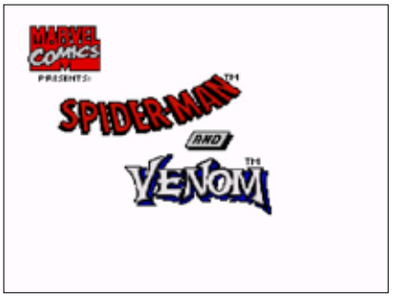
Insider Insight:
I was introduced to Spider-Man not through the comic book medium in which he was created, but via the 1960s cartoon. When Fox Kids brought back Spider-Man in the '90s in a brand new animated series, it reignited my love of the character. Every day I would go to school wearing a fanny pack full of Spider-Man action figures, and when I saw there was a video game inspired by the show coming out for the SNES, I knew I had to beg my parents to get me it for my birthday. "It has twenty villains!" was something I am sure I said, quoting the marketing ads for the game as if that gave it greater value.

Being an eleven-year-old, I did not really follow reviews so I did not know that outlets like *Electronic Gaming Monthly* were giving the game an average score of 4.25/10. All I knew is that when I hit power on my console, I was greeted by a rendition of the cartoon's theme song created by Joe Perry from Aerosmith, and therefore it was a 10/10 in my book.

Over the years, I have realized that *Spider-Man* is not that good of a game like a lot of its LJN brethren, due mostly to loose controls in jumping and fighting that require you to dangerously fight the Lizard in the sewers in a quest for more lives. However, it is still something I remember fondly, if for nothing else than the amusement park music that is ingrained in my mind, along with the non-villain enemies who look like Master Chief from *Halo*. – Blair Farrell

Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.



Based on the fourteen-part crossover comic book series published by Marvel, *Maximum Carnage* is a beat-'em-up in the tradition of *Streets of Rage* and *Final Fight*. Players guide Spider-Man through twenty-seven levels, battling thugs and super-villains. Spidey can walk, run, jump, punch, kick, somersault, back flip, fire web bolts, swing on webs, crawl on walls, form web shields, and use spider sense, which tingles when danger is near.

The Webbed Wonder can also call on other superheroes for aid, including Captain America, Black Cat, Deathlok, Firestar, and Iron Fist. Simply pick up the superhero icons when you see them and use as needed. At certain points throughout the game's twenty-seven levels of play you can switch to playing as Venom, who was created when Spider-Man's (temporary) black alien symbiote costume melded with reporter Eddie Brock. The symbiote also infected Cletus Kasady, who as a result became Carnage.

Traditionally a villain, Venom hates Peter Parker (a.k.a. Spider-Man), but he feels responsible for the havoc being wreaked by Carnage, so he assumes the role of one of the good guys in this game. Carnage has enlisted Carrion, Shriek, Doppelganger, Demogoblin, and other supervillains and thugs to join his reign of wanton chaos, destruction, and mayhem. Security systems, robots, crazed citizens, and other obstacles will also challenge Spidey.

The action takes place in New York City and San Francisco. You will fight in the streets and alleyways, on rooftops, inside the Fantastic Four building, and in Central Park. To help you in your struggle to maintain law and order you can collect energy boosters, extra lives, and continues that appear throughout the game. Unfortunately, there is no two-player mode. The SNES version of *Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage* has slightly better graphics and sounds than its near-identical Genesis counterpart.

Notable Quotable:

"Acclaim has done its bit to overcome the somewhat repetitive action by throwing enough backgrounds, power-ups, and other extras to keep players from getting bored. It's not perfect, but it's easily the best Spider-Man game to date." – *Game Players* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Spider-Man just doesn't have it in this one—the graphics are sloppy (like the kicks and punches) and the control is adequate at best. The cameos by other superheroes are cool, but can't make up for the other poor elements." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage

Insider Insight:
That red cartridge, man! Not since the gold cartridge on NES for the original *Legend of Zelda* has a simple marketing ploy so attracted my interest. Whereas LJN usually stands for "Let's Just Not" in my book, the company so infamous for licensed schlock actually seemed to care with this release. While it is not the greatest beat-'em-up of all time, I still really enjoyed it, and it is the most spot-on adaptation of any comic book story ever. My knowledge of Spider-Man was pretty basic at this point in time, and the game gave me a huge appreciation for Venom (fresh off his awesome arcade-based intro to me in Sega's *Spider-Man: The Videogame*), Carnage, and some of the more obscure Spidey villains like Shriek, Doppelganger, Carrion, and Demogoblin.

Another core feature that defined this game: the rockin' Green Jellÿ soundtrack, which was one of the best video game soundtracks of the era (and the SNES version definitely was what Genesis was not when it came to the actual music here). It helped that the band was hot off their "Three Little Pigs" novelty song, with its amazing claymation video I watched every day after school in 1993.

Little could I have known at the time that the soundtrack would affect my "real world" work over twenty years later. While at Gazillion working on *Marvel Heroes*, we were adding Carnage to the game as a Team-Up character, and I pushed to get a trailer done because he is so popular. My initial direction for music was that we needed to make it evoke Green Jellÿ's soundtrack, but then it hit me—why not just try to license the actual music? Within four days we had worked out a deal with the band to license "Carnage Rules" and had cut a full, Marvel-approved trailer. Just YouTube "Marvel Heroes Carnage" and it should come right up. Seeing comments like, "I'm downloading your game after bringing nostalgic tears to my eyes" was icing on the cake to my own personal fanboying out over the whole thing. – Chris Baker

Insider Insight:
If you type "4 Park Place Manchester" into Google Map search, you will find an unassuming building in an area called Cheetham Hill, just off Manchester Arena. In the early '90s, many great video games we fondly remember from the 16-bit era consoles were made there. At eighteen, I failed to get into university to study filmmaking. Instead, I got a job as a games tester at Software Creations, testing games like *Solstice II: Equinox*, *Plok*, and *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball*. It was better than wasting all my time and money at the arcades.

One day I was asked if I wanted to help out on *Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage*. The game is a side-scrolling beat-'em-up with big colorful sprites, and my boss Rick knew I was into this genre of games. The job was to populate the levels and make the game fun. Back then, this task normally would have gone to a programmer or an artist, as the level designer position was not invented yet.

I admit I was not a superhero comic book fan, so I certainly hadn't read the comics this game was based on until I borrowed them from the artists who were on a different floor from me. I was still working from "the dungeon," which is what we used to call the basement level of the office.

I was given my own Intel 486 computer and a crash course on the data structure of the game code. You could already run around as Spider-Man on the screen, but there was nothing to do—no heads to smash and no supervillains to defeat. Apart from the key storyline events, I think we were pretty much left to our own devices by the publisher to fill out all the bits in between. All the henchmen in the game were given names of our friends and family. This is how the droids on the Fantastic Four level came to be known as "Chunbots" and the creature at the end called "Muzzoid" after the lead programmer, Paul Murray.

I remember when the game came out it received mixed reviews. There is a misconception that Green Jellÿ did all the music for the game when they only supplied the title music. The rest was created by our talented in-house musician, Chris. The main critique was the lack of two- player co-op mode; people wanted to play as Spidey and Venom together. This was addressed in the sequel, *Separation Anxiety*, which I only made a small contribution to, as I was on a different project.

Funny how years later and all the games I have made in between, *Maximum Carnage* remains the game that most people talk about on the internet. When they do, it is almost certain that somebody will say how ridiculously difficult and unforgiving it is. To that I say rookie designer mistake; I was making the game for myself and not the player. When you work on a game and you play it day in day out, naturally you become an expert. I do not ever recall Acclaim telling me to tone the difficulty down.

I did play the game again recently, having not picked it up for over a decade. While I did not quite 1CC it, I got pretty close. If I had played a second game I am sure I would have done it. The key to success is to explore and get all those superhero pickups. Why try to take on everyone alone when you have got Cloak & Dagger as back up? – Chun Wah Kong

Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

An assassin who calls himself Arcade has captured four members of the mutant superhero gang the X-Men and taken them to his amusement park. Unfortunately, the rides, games, and attractions in this park are as deadly as the man who created them. Wolverine, Cyclops, Storm, and Gambit are in peril and Spider-Man must find them.

You begin the game as Spider-Man, who has super strength, heightened agility, and the ability to climb walls. He can also swing on synthetic webs of his own design and use them to fire web bolts. Your first job is to touch each of the security eyes in the security system that protects the amusement park. You can use your Spider-Sense to help you locate the security devices, but you should avoid the robots that guard the area.

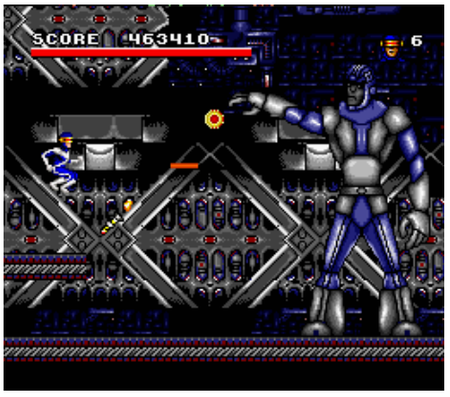
Once you enter Arcade's chamber of horrors you must guide each of the five superheroes through two danger-filled events specifically designed to test their particular powers and weaknesses. Throughout the levels you can pick up bonus lives and points, extra energy, and a variety of character-specific items, such as a whirlwind attack for Storm and a power blast for Cyclops. You can select any hero in any order.

Wolverine—the most popular of the X-Men—finds himself trapped in Arcade's funhouse. He must use his adamantium claws to hack and slash his way through machine-gun-firing Jack-in-the-Boxes, bayonet-carrying toy soldiers, exploding building blocks, and other dangerous enemies and obstacles to reach Apocalypse. Wolverine must also destroy robot replicas of Obnoxio. In the second event, you must help Wolverine defeat the slow but huge Juggernaut. To defeat the giant, you must slash the ropes supporting the anvils and one-ton weights above his head.

The leader of the X-Men, Cyclops, wields a powerful optic blast which lets loose when he removes his shades. Cyclops must avoid droid bombers, fire-shooting stun guns, and radioactive robots while on a runaway mine cart that rides on electrified tracks. Second, he must battle the spawn of the Master Mold, a high-tech giant bent on ridding the world of mutants.

Thanks to her weather-controlling powers, Storm can fly on the winds, create lightning storms, and fire deadly lightning bolts. She must navigate an underwater maze while fighting off or avoiding sea mines, metallic squid and piranha, and harpoon-firing scuba divers. While monitoring her air supply she must destroy all the underwater hatches, then find and demolish the glass spheres of Arcade's hydroelectric power plant.

Gambit—one of few superheroes from the south—has agility in spades (so to speak) and the uncanny ability to charge playing cards (or most anything else) with kinetic energy. You must assist him in battling evil chess pieces and other enemies while out-maneuvering an invulnerable, gigantic doom ball covered with spikes. Then he must scale a building that is crumbling apart to confront



the Black Queen, a powerful supervillain who controls inorganic matter.

Although Spider-Man's job was to rescue the X-Men, he was also captured and given his own tests of strength and resolve. At the scene of a deadly "de-construction site," you must help him fight numerous villains and thugs, including the Shocker, Spider-Slayers, welding droids, N'Astirh, Carnage, and Rhino. Then Spider-Man will go up against Arcade himself, who is armed with a 9 mm pistol

Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge

and outfitted with a plethora of Arcade duplicates. *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge* was also released for the Genesis, Game Boy, and Game Gear.

Fun Fact: This game is based on the storyline from *The Uncanny X-Men* issues 123–124, written by Chris Claremont and John Byrne, penciled by Byrne, and inked by Terry Austin.

Notable Quotable:

"A very challenging game, marred only by the lack of continues or a password system. Otherwise highly recommended, even if you don't like Marvel Comics." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (November 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"I really like the way *X-Men* is laid out. The characters are small and well animated, making the levels seem huge and cavernous, and the gameplay is right on . . . Another excellent SNES title with outstanding music." – *GameFan Magazine* (October 1992)

Insider Insight:

There are very few Super Nintendo games as nostalgic for me as *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge*.This was an early game for my family and we loved every minute of it. It was also one of the first games that showed me how far along video game music had come.While the Super Nintendo had already impressed us with its far superior graphics to the NES, it was the sound that seemed to take center stage in this game.The guitar riffs and '70s-style soundtrack blew my mind with how clear the MIDI instruments could sound. Guitar was rare to hear in games, as most used horns and other orchestrations.

The graphics were no slouch either. Granted, the last X-Men game I played before this one was the awful *Uncanny X-Men* for the NES. Seeing the characters in full detail and not interchangeable blobs was a pleasant change. I was ecstatic to finally see Gambit in a video game; this made the whole game worth it. The rest was icing on the cake. Objectively, the action was monotonous and not that creative mechanics-wise, but there was something fun about it that always brought my siblings and I back for more. – Zoe K. Howard

Spindizzy Worlds

Publisher: ASCII Entertainment Software.
Developer: ASCIIware.
Game Type: Action Puzzle/Maze, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

The sequel to the computer game *Spindizzy*, *Spindizzy Worlds* (also released for computers) has you guiding a spinning top-like apparatus called a "Geographic Environmental Reconnaissance and Land-mapping Device" (G.E.R.A.L.D. for short) around a series of isometric, maze-like playfields, avoiding falling off ledges or running into such obstacles and enemies as aliens, lava, spikes, and falling boulders. You will also open gates and solve puzzles based on maneuvering over colored buttons to make platforms move and blocks disappear.

The spinning object you control can't jump on its own, but it can reach higher platforms and leap over gaps by moving quickly up ramps and slopes. It can also use certain platforms and warps to make it bounce. You can rotate the isometric view by pressing the L and R trigger buttons, allowing you to observe the level from four different angles. Collecting crystals lets you replenish your energy.

According to the storyline, *Spindizzy Worlds* takes place on a "solar system layered with clusters of worlds so perilous, nothing but top speed and intense coordination can transport you from sphere to sphere." There are thirty worlds and fifteen increasingly difficult levels within each world. A special mapping mode reveals terrain ahead of you and passwords save your progress. A big part of the challenge comes from the fact that you are maneuvering on slippery ledges with inertia-based controls.

Notable Quotable:

"This game definitely deserves notice, even if you're not a puzzler fan. The graphics and control are enough to wow you, and the puzzles will keep you up at night." – *GamePro* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The Amiga roots of *Spindizzy Worlds* are instantly clear from the title screen. Unlike most other computer ports, *Spindizzy Worlds* doesn't have an interface that tries to mimic a mouse cursor. Part of that might be because it's a simple puzzle game that doesn't need any fancy precision, but if it weren't for the computery presentation I wouldn't have had a clue it wasn't a native console game . . . The most striking thing is how well the game pulls off the fake 3D. There's a fantastic illusion of depth here that looks really impressive and smooth in motion." – SNES A Day (snesaday.com)

Insider Insight:
The '92 Consumer Electronics Show (CES) was where I first came across *Spindizzy Worlds*. I remember it well, because I was young in the industry, and the programmer of the game took the time to personally demonstrate it for me. Over the years I have forgotten the gentleman's name, but I will never forget how he made me feel. He was the first to really take me seriously in the field. Perhaps he was just being kind, but he sold me on the game, which I bought outright the day of release.

As it turned out, the game was much deeper than I had initially perceived during the brief demonstration at CES. It played like a combination of *Marble Madness* and *Crystal Castles*, so I was a very happy gamer to say the least. I still think fondly of the programmer, and perhaps he will read this entry and know what an impression he made on me way back when. – Michael Thomasson

The Sporting News Baseball

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: Now Production.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

The Sporting News Baseball has MLBPA licensing, meaning real players from the 1994 season are featured. There is no Major League Baseball license, but team names can be edited for a more authentic experience. There are three generic stadiums, each featuring day or night games: Dome (artificial turf), Ballpark (real grass), and Dream Field, a cornfield-surrounded venue inspired by the Kevin Costner film *Field of Dreams* (1989). The viewpoint is from behind the batter, switching to overhead when the ball—trackable via a shadow—is hit into play.

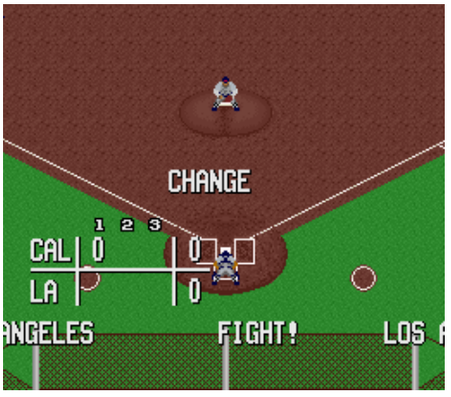
Modes include Pennant Race (season), Exhibition, All-Star, and Homerun Competition, which lets you hit 10, 20, 50, or 100 balls. Players can bunt, turn errors on or off, reposition hitters and batters, control the speed and course of pitches, make diving catches, check runners, shift defenses (to play close or far, and to the left or right), make player substitutions, and more. You can customize seasons from 26, 52, 78, or a full 162 games, and you can save both team and individual statistics via battery. The game has more features than *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball*, but is slower paced and not as finely programmed.

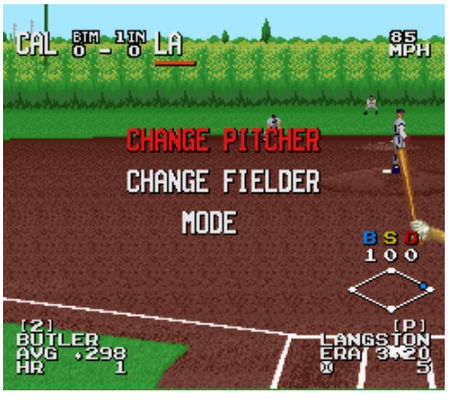
Fun Fact: This game was endorsed by *The Sporting News* (nicknamed "The Bible of Baseball"), which was published from 1886–2012. While no longer a print publication, it does live on via the web: www.sportingnews.com.

Notable Quotable:
"This game plays decently, but it doesn't get me too excited. Hitting at times is difficult. But if I had a choice of whether to take to the field or sit on the bench, I'd sooner sit on the bench spitting sunflower seeds." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"There are better arcade-style baseball cartridges available for the Super NES, but *The Sporting News Baseball* by no means disappoints. While it lacks the charisma and extras of more notable games, it remains a solid title that's sure to entertain." – *Game Players* (June 1995)

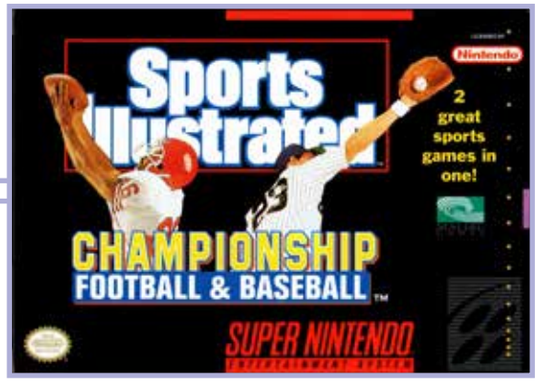
Notable Quotable:
"Baseball video games do serve a purpose, but that purpose is usually better served than it is by *Sporting News Baseball*. And with the strike finally over and a new season of games to watch on TV, playing through nine innings of a video game of this low quality should seem all the more unbearable." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (June 1995)

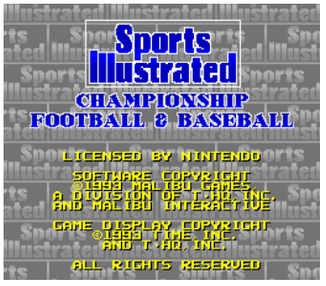




Sports Illustrated Championship Football & Baseball

Publisher: Malibu Games.
Developer: Malibu Interactive.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.





This two-in-one cartridge features twenty-eight generic football and twenty-eight generic baseball teams. *Football*, seen from an isometric viewpoint, includes more than ninety offensive and defensive plays to call, and it boasts a special ZOOM feature that gives players a closer look at important plays on the field. You can toggle game time (20, 40, or 60 minutes), penalties, and difficulty level, and play an Exhibition game or a full Season.

In *Baseball*, you view the game (Exhibition or Season) from a traditional behind-the-batter perspective. When you get a hit the camera follows the ball, and there is an inset graphic of the bases on the bottom/left of the screen. You can play games lasting 3, 6, or 9 innings.

Both *Football* and *Baseball* feature digitized voice samples and celebratory animations, and the Season mode in each game has complete league standings, a complete team/league schedule, and side-by-side team comparisons prior to each match. Two-on-two action is head-to-head, but there is no co-op play. Also both games are generally derided by SNES sports fans. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. In Europe the game, sans *Baseball*, was published as *All-American Championship Football*.

Fun Fact: Malibu Interactive was a division of Malibu Comics Entertainment Inc.

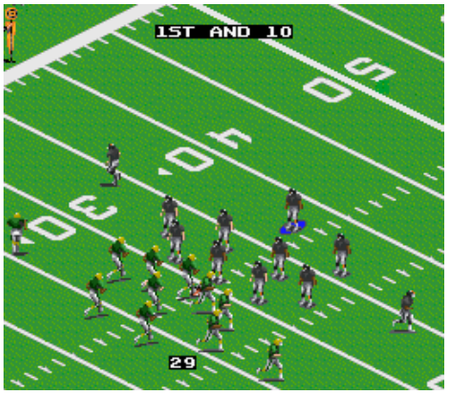
Fun Fact: *Sports Illustrated* was first published in 1954. The cover of that first issue, photographed by Mark Kauffman, featured a baseball game in action with Eddie Mathews at bat, Wes Westrum catching, and umpire Augie Donotelli looking on.

Notable Quotable:

"Now here's an interesting idea, two games for the price of one. Unfortunately, both of those games happen to be pretty lame." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Guide to Video Games* (1995, Adventure Press)

Notable Quotable:

"While the football is your average football game of this era, the baseball has a few unique mechanics that make it a game at least worth giving a try . . . The football is decent . . . I enjoyed the baseball a little bit more." – BrothersForgeGaming (YouTube)



Star Fox

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Argonaut Software/Nintendo.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Known for introducing Nintendo's Super FX chip technology, *Star Fox* is a 3D space shooter with polygonal graphics (a rarity for the time), standout voice effects, and a grand musical score. Players portray Fox McCloud as he pilots his Arwing fighter (which can dive, climb, and roll right and left) through space and planetary areas, shooting fighter ships, alien tanks, laser gun emplacements, super battleships, and other enemies and obstacles. You will dodge enemy missiles and lasers, fly through narrow gaps, and face such bosses as Attack Carrier, Rock Crusher, and Metal Smasher.

The shooting action—which is a lot of fun and not too tough, even for casual gamers—is on-rails, and your ship is equipped with an autopilot device that keeps you on course to the Enemy Leader at the end of each stage. If you veer off course, a red arrow appears at the edge of the screen. When an enemy attack damages your ship or you collide with an obstacle it will shorten your shield meter. When it is reduced to nothing your ship will explode. You can toggle between three views of the action: cockpit, approach (outside and slightly behind your ship), and standard (similar to approach, but slightly farther behind your ship).

As you proceed through the game—main stages include Meteor, Venom, Macbeth, Fortuna, Asteroid Field, Corneria, and Titania—you can fly through supply rings to replenish energy. Other items you can acquire include power shields, nova bombs, twin blasters (fire two laser beam blasters at once), and wing gyros (repairs your damaged wing). Your three wingmen—Slippy Toad, Falco Lombardi (a member of an avian race), and Peppy Hare—lend a helping hand, but you must cover their backs as well. If you fail to help, they can sustain damage from enemy fire and may even be shot down. Your ultimate goal is to defend your home world of Corneria against the attacking forces of Emperor Andross.

A favorite among SNES owners, Star Fox spawned *Star Fox 64* for the N64, *Star Fox Command* for the DS, *Star Fox 64 3D* for the 3DS, *Star Fox: Assault* and *Star Fox Adventures* for the Game Cube, and *Star Fox Guard* and *Star Fox Zero* for the Wii U. A sequel, *Star Fox 2*, was developed but never released, at least until it was included with the SNES Classic Edition console in 2017. Known as *Starwing* in Europe.

Notable Quotable:
"Unlike most games of this genre, *Star Fox* shows some heart behind the hardware—rarely have such powerful spacecrafts been piloted by so adorable an array of frogs, birds, and bunnies." – *Entertainment Weekly* (April 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Argonaut and Nintendo created a magical team for this project. The sparks literally flew from the screen, in a genuine mix of European

and Japanese talent. Aurally, visually, and in its character design and presentation it was phenomenal in 1993, and will be rightly remembered as a classic." – Jamie O'Neill (www.nintendolife.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Even with the Super FX chip, Super NES had a lot of constraints. Rendering any design you like in polygons results in processing overload. So when rendering starfighters, I went through a process of trial and error in order to make the direction their noses were pointing clear with the smallest number of polygons possible." – *Star Fox* co-developer Tsuyoshi Watanabe (www.nintendo.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Each new polygon vertex increases the processing burden. So I investigated how many vertices I could show on one screen beforehand. As a result, I made many buildings square or triangular and made enemies with as few polygons as possible, with flat shapes so they could fly in any direction . . . We put a pattern on the ground and had it scroll to convey a sense of movement." – *Star Fox* co-developer Shigeru Miyamoto (www.nintendo.com)

Insider Insight:

I never liked Nintendo. The Sega Genesis just seemed like a more interesting console to my adolescent mind, which was mesmerized by the flash of Shinobi's shurikens and the speed with which Sonic looped through levels. I was pretty much a diehard Sega fanboy . . . until the day I first laid eyes on *Star Fox*.

Video games had always been flat cartoons—they were worlds compressed into two dimensions—but *Star Fox* felt like a peek into the future. It might look primitive today, but *Star Fox*'s planets seemed like fully realized worlds at the time. Thankfully, the gameplay of Nintendo's on-rails shooter lived up to everything I wanted from a game that looked that good. I felt like I was exploring the universe in my own tiny spaceship as I turned Andross' droid army into space dust. I was single-handedly saving the universe. *Star Fox* is the reason I bought an SNES, and it instilled in me a love of shooters. To this day, I can't play a space shooter without getting pulled back in time to 1993, and those first moments with that lovable puppet, Fox McCloud. – Benjamin Reeves

Insider Insight:

I was a Genesis kid growing up, partially because I was one of the few weird kids that had owned a Sega Master System, and partially because I loved *Sonic the Hedgehog*. Still, even though I had chosen my side in the great "Console Wars," I was secretly jealous of a few SNES games, and one of the biggest was *Star Fox*. Practically every department store at the time had an SNES kiosk with this game because it was a great showpiece for the future of gaming, all on a modest 16-bit console. With its sluggish framerate, weird controls, and ships constructed of maybe a dozen polygons it looks incredibly quaint nowadays, but back in the '90s, I was enamored. Plus its sound was incredible, from its stellar soundtrack (whose composer has since practically fallen off the map), the "emergency!" announcement as your ship launched, and the unintelligible blather of the characters during combat.

Nintendo made a wise decision giving these simple shapes personality by putting you in the role of a group of intergalactic animals. So even though it is just "Furry Star Wars," it is still a notable change from all other bland space and fight sims that were typical on PCs. Unfortunately, Nintendo never seemed to know what to do with the *Star Fox* series, eventually moving it from its rail shooter roots and placing it into all kinds of other genres, or mucking up the controls with some new gimmick. For all of the things that the company excels at, it still has problems when it has a great idea but has absolutely no clue how to develop it properly. – Kurt Kalata

Star Fox 2

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 2017.

Included as a bonus game built into the SNES Classic Edition plug 'n' play console, *Star Fox 2*—the original sequel to *Star Fox*—was completed and scheduled for release back in 1996, but was cancelled before it went to market. Fox McCloud and company have defeated Emperor Andross and his plans to seize control of the Lylat system. However, Andross survived and is consumed with revenge, plotting an invasion even worse than the last one.

You, as Fox, must defeat Andross and his "shadowy squad of unscrupulous mercenaries known as Star Wolf," comprised of Wolf O'Donnell, Leon Powalksi, Pigma Dengar, and Algy. To help you on your mission you are joined by Falco, Peppy, and Slippy—your wingmen from the last game—along with two new characters: Miyu, a lady cat; and Fay, a female dog. You can select to play as any of the six heroes, each of whom has a special ability, such as super bomb, healing, or a shield. You also pick out your wingman, who acts as your sole extra life.

Once again you pilot the Arwing, which can shoot, brake, boost (temporary increase in speed), and do left and right barrel rolls. You can also transform from flight mode into walker mode, where you traverse the surface of the planet, shooting, jumping, swimming, side-stepping, and moving forward and backward.

Star Fox 2 is more complex than the original game. According to ign.com, the primary difference is a "real-time strategy-like frame built around its third-person battles that puts pressure on you at every moment. Even as you're dogfighting above planets, cruising through dreadnaughts in Death Star-like trench runs, and exploring corridors, enemy forces spawn on the map and creep closer to your home planet in real time. Juggling defensive attacks on smaller enemies with strikes that take out the sources of the threats on planets and ships makes for enjoyably frantic multitasking. Occasionally, special events like a big dragon boss or invading spiders on a friendly space station pop up to make things chaotic and different each time you play. Hard mode especially shakes things up with additional levels and bosses."

Notable Quotable:

"The Super FX 2 chip allowed more polygons and the possibilities broadened for what we could show. So we decided to have the fighters transform . . . We could show more but could still only produce graphics that looked simple . . . At the time, we used the latest technology and worked as hard as we could to make the game, but I'm not sure how enjoyable people will find it today . . . To be honest, it's embarrassing! It's like having an old diary suddenly appear and be exposed in public!" – *Star Fox 2* co-developer Tsuyoshi Watanabe (www.nintendo.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The world map moves in real-time. Your ship—a tiny icon—flies to different levels, but you can also intercept missiles or fighters, prompting a short dogfight where you shoot them down. As such, level selection becomes a tactical concern: Choosing whether to play offense or defense, and positioning yourself well to do both, are all essential for success. Time is a factor as well. The invaders move even when you are playing a mission: Take too long on a base mission and you may not have enough time to catch that missile before it hits." – Mike Epstein (www.digitaltrends.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Star Fox 2* has some beautiful, totally '90s moments, and is an ambitious mashup of an RTS and a 3D shooter. But it's just too damn annoying to play. Those control and framerate problems make *Star Fox 2* the worst game in the SNES Classic Edition. While others in the collection have controls and graphics that didn't age well (*Super Mario Kart* and *F-Zero* come to mind), *Star Fox 2* is the roughest of the bunch. Looking back, it probably deserved to be cancelled. But it also deserved to see the light of day, and I'm glad I got to play this piece of gaming history." – Sam Claiborn (www.ign.com)

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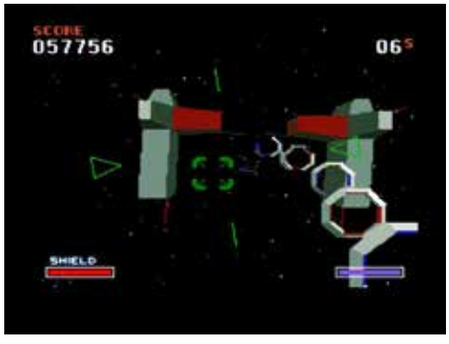
Star Fox Super Weekend

Publisher: Nintendo
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Created for international *Star Fox* competitions hosted by *Nintendo Power* magazine, *Star Fox Super Weekend*—which is often called "Super Star Fox Weekend" or "Star Fox Official Competition Cartridge"—has one gameplay mode featuring modified versions of the first Corneria and Asteroid stages. To add to the challenge and scoring opportunities extra rings and other items were added. The singular mode of play also includes a bonus stage (where you will fly through eight-sided polygons) created specifically for this cartridge and the competition. The altered start-up screen reads "Official Competition Cartridge." If you fail to beat all three stages within a four-minute time limit the game will end, and Slippy will pop up, telling you, via text, "Time Up!"

The competitions were held in various toy and video stores across the US and Europe, with high-scoring players receiving T-shirts, jackets, or trips to international destinations. An estimated 2,000 cartridges were produced, and for a brief time after the event was over, a limited number of the cartridges were offered for $45 each in the spring 1994 *Super Power Supplies* catalog mailed to *Nintendo Power* subscribers. Today the game is worth well over $1,000. Known as *Starwing Competition* in the UK.



Insider Insight:
Forty-five dollars. That's how much this thing would have cost me back in 1994, when the *Super Power Supplies* catalog landed in my hands. I was a huge *Star Fox* fan, and I really wanted to be a part of the tournament. Unfortunately, thirteen-year-old me could not drive, so competing wasn't going to happen. But then, right in front of me was an opportunity to get a piece of that tournament all to myself. An opportunity to get my hands on a cartridge that would become one of the more sought after SNES collectors' items in only a few short years.

Well, you know what else thirteen-year-old me could not do? Make wise buying decisions. My mom told me I could get one thing from that catalog and I picked . . . a T-shirt. That's right. I looked right at that cartridge and said to myself, "I have the full game already. What would I want this for?" Don't get me wrong, it was one of the coolest T-shirts I have ever seen—it had the final boss fight screen from the original *Star Fox* printed on the back!—but in retrospect, I was a fool. A well-dressed fool who saved his mom $45, but a fool nonetheless. – Kris Randazzo

Insider Insight:
Super Star Fox Weekend is just one out of the six Nintendo competitions that happened in the early 1990s. I have made it a personal mission to master these high-valued games. *Super Star Fox Weekend* is the last of the original six competition carts that I am working on, studying to discover the best methods for a higher score within a four-minute time limit.

I saved *Super Star Fox Weekend* for last because I knew I was going to have the toughest time with it. I am currently sitting with a high score 155,000 and some change, while the world record is just over 199,000. I can't imagine what the player did to obtain such a high score—155K is difficult enough as it is. Using bombs wisely, getting 100% stage clears on the first two levels, constantly switching from first-person view to third-person view, picking up gold rings, and going through rings in the third level; these methods are what it takes to be good at the game. It is going to take a lot of attempts for me to beat that score.

I hope you are also up for the challenge. Learn your route and blow through Corneria. Move swiftly through the Asteroid Field while shooting enemies and rocks. Finally, get a far as you can collecting bonus points and flying through rings in the Space Armada.

So now that I have shared how to get your high scores on this game, how many of you are going to join me in attempting to get that world record score? You probably do not own this rare game, but there is always emulation. – Paul Tesi

Star Trek: Deep Space Nine—Crossroads of Time

Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment.
Developer: Novotrade International.
Game Type: Action/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Constructed like an episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*, which ran for seven seasons from 1993–1999, *Crossroads of Time* lets players guide a running, jumping, climbing, ledge-grabbing Commander Benjamin Sisko through the remote, labyrinthine space station of the title, finding and using phasers, tricorders, replicators, hypospray, and other Trek devices to complete a variety of (largely side-scrolling) objectives and puzzles. This includes disarming bombs, crashing computers, battling the Borg (who can adapt to phaser fire), and conferring with fellow DS9 denizens, including Quark (bartender), Major Kira Nerys (first officer), Lieutenant Jadzia Dax (chief science officer), Dr. Julian Bashir (chief medical officer), and Miles O'Brien (chief of operations). Encountering these characters is crucial, because each crew member has information that can help you in completing your goals.

At a certain point you will play as shape-shifting security chief Odo, who you can transform into a puddle and a Cardassian vole (essentially a rat). With these abilities you will traverse a Cardassian ship's vents and corridors and disable its weapons. You will also control Dr. Bashir. In one side-scrolling shooter level, you will pilot the Federation starship *Runabout* shuttle through the wormhole and an asteroid field. The backgrounds evoke the TV show sets, and the music is faithful to the series as well. Also released for the Genesis.

Memories: I am a huge *Star Trek* fan, especially of *The Original Series* and *The Next Generation*. When *Deep Space Nine* was announced, I was skeptical of a *Trek* show set on a space station (as opposed to a starship) because the whole premise of the franchise is space exploration. Fortunately, I found *DS9* on the whole (wormhole?) to be deep (naturally) and extremely engaging (despite being slow and staid at times), and the characters and environments, though innately unlikeable at times, quickly grew on me.

Notable Quotable:

"The emphasis is mostly on puzzle-solving, but there is enough phaser slinging and runabout piloting to leaven the brain work . . . not going to challenge any industry standards in sound or graphics, but for trekophiles, it should be very satisfying." – *Electronic Games* (July 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Gameplay soon becomes repetitive with Sisko running through similar-looking levels again and again. True adventure gamers may want to beam elsewhere for this type of action, but *Deep Space Nine* fans will warp onto this cart because of its authentic flair." – *GamePro* (June 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Deep Space Nine* has the feeling of the show. The backgrounds are all taken from the series, the characters are drawn with great attention to detail, and it's actually quite fun to play. Some of the areas to go through are tough, but it's a welcome challenge. The control was just fine for my tastes. Even though it is on the Super NES, the sound needed work. If you like these types of games, it's worth checking out." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1995)

Star Trek: Starfleet Academy—Starship Bridge Simulator

Publisher: Interplay Productions.
Developer: Interplay Productions.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator/Adventure, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

As a male or female cadet, play through twenty-one virtual missions, including ones based on the *Star Trek: The Original Series* episode "Balance of Terror"; the movies *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan* and *Star Trek VI: The Undiscovered Country*; and the famed Kobayashi Maru scenario, in which Captain Kirk cheats to beat a computer simulation. Your goal is to become a Starfleet Captain, but you can also play as a Klingon Captain or Romulan Commander. The space combat (you control speed, navigation, and weapons)—viewed from the bridge of your simulated starship—is sluggish, but the emphasis of the game is on such peaceful endeavors as exploring planets, performing sensor sweeps, solving mysteries, hailing and rescuing other ships, and communicating with other characters (such as your science officer, who offers advice). You will pilot five different ships, from science vessels to Constitution-class heavy cruisers. If you are overly aggressive at the wrong time you will get penalized.

The game has polygonal graphics but without the benefit of the Super FX chip used in such games as *Star Fox* and *Stunt Race FX*, meaning excessive slowdown rears its ugly head. The ships and other outer space objects are plain in appearance, but the bridge and on-screen characters look decent. A special two-player mode lets you engage in space battles against a friend.

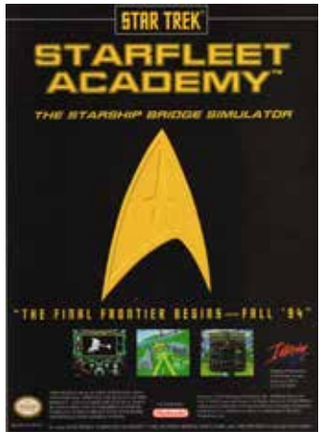
Compared to the 32X port developed by High Voltage Software the games are similar, but the graphics, sounds, and controls are more polished on the Sega console. In addition, the 32X version adds a top-down billiards simulation. Some of the characters in the game are the same as in *Star Trek: Starfleet Academy* for the PC and Mac, which followed in 1997, but the missions are different and there are fewer space battles in the computer game. Also, the computer game has full-motion video featuring *Star Trek* cast members.

Notable Quotable:

"A nice variation on the theme (and a departure from the previous *Star Trek* game), this one is more comprehensive in that it is more than just a shooter—you must master all aspects of a starship's functions. The combat training is a little aggravating at first, with enemies that hit you several times before you even see them." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The game will always crawl around at a 10–15 frame rate, with heavier slowdown if multiple polygonal objects are moving around the screen at once. Accelerating the ship also drags the framerate noticeably. Distant objects are impossible to make out, and other than the mission objects, your surroundings are nothing but a barren field of moving stars. Flat-shaded, un-textured polygons, single-color planets, and wimpy sprite explosions also mean there'll be no effects to impress the graphically inclined. The choppy processing also makes ship-to-ship combat feel sluggish, while the ships themselves still curiously handle like fighter jets. Your ships have forward mass but can turn instantly, which, coupled with the framerate lag, can make precise aiming a bear. It seems outright impossible to dodge enemy fire—unlike the PC version, your ship is covered with a single universal shield, so there's no strategy available to minimize the damage you're taking . . . Overall, it's a series of generally well-written missions that nails the tone of the show, hampered by a choppy engine running on (arguably) the wrong platform altogether." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)



Insider Insight:
I did not become interested in *Star Trek* until the early 1990s, when I caught a syndicated episode of *The Next Generation*. I was immediately hooked on the franchise, but found my choices for console *Star Trek* games pretty limited in number and quality. When it hit the local rental shelves, *Starfleet Academy* was the closest to what I was looking for out of the game: it had a story arc running through it, fun pieces of backstory, impressive (for the time) 3D graphics, and did not require every mission to turn into a shootout. The bonus missions based off of standoffs in the original series and the movies were really cool, and I appreciated the Easter egg that let you beat the infamous Kobayashi Maru test the same way Kirk said he did in *Star Trek II*! While it was still a bit more combat heavy than I would have preferred out of a *Star Trek* game, *Starfleet Academy* captured the feel of the series' universe in a way that its console predecessors failed to. – Kevin Bunch

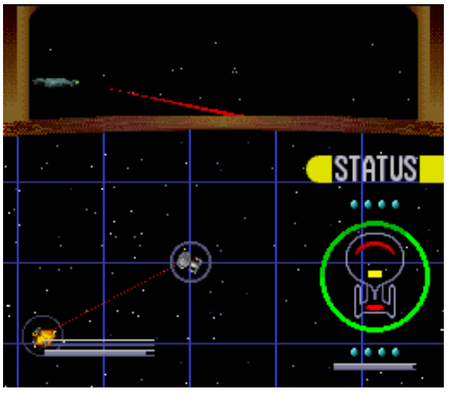
Star Trek: The Next Generation—"Future's Past"

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte.
Developer: Spectrum HoloByte.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

"Future's Past" plays a lot like a typical episode of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*. The storyline finds the Federation and the Romulans interested in the most powerful device in the galaxy: the Derandomizer. The action begins on the bridge of the starship *Enterprise*, where you have access to seven different control stations: communications, conn (set the ship's course), briefing room (confer with Captain Picard and other senior officers), sensors (scan unknown objects), computers (look up information), engineering station (repair ship after it is damaged in battle), and transporter room (send away teams to visit various planets—away missions are viewed from a top-down perspective).

Each crew member has specific abilities and is rated according to three attributes: tactical, strength, and technical. Picard is a skilled diplomat and respected leader. Commander William T. Riker is skilled with a phaser. Lieutenant Commander Data has great strength, sensory abilities, and computer-like intelligence. Lieutenant Worf is stronger and has better fighting skills than most, while Lieutenant Geordi La Forge–an expert with the tricorder–can see in ranges beyond those of normally sighted people. Dr. Beverly Crusher can heal humans and aliens, while Counselor Deanna Troi can feel the emotions of people around her and has an edge when communicating with alien races. In away missions—which offer real-time combat and puzzle-solving (get hints from tricorder readings, find and use various objects in proper fashion)—you can control each team member individually, or order different members to follow the member you are currently controlling.

When the *Enterprise* gets attacked your ship will automatically go to red alert, and the view will switch to Worf's tactical screen, providing top-down as well as close-up views of the battles. A grid system shows where your ship is in relation to enemy vessels. You can go forward and backward and rotate right and left. To fend off enemies, the *Enterprise* is equipped with fore and aft phasers and torpedoes. If your opponent gets heavily damaged he may hail you to try and resolve the conflict peacefully. The game is similar to *Star Trek: The Next Generation—Echoes from the Past* for the Genesis, but the Genesis game plays at a faster pace and has some differences in away mission map layouts.



Notable Quotable:

"Star Trek games typically haven't been exciting, but this game is better. There's more interaction with the characters both on and off the ship. Every aspect of ship operation is at your control, yet taking the landing party down for missions gets boring. The graphics and cinemas would be better if they weren't so pixelated. The storyline is very cool with tons of missions and fans of the show, like me, will find it interesting." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"All the elements you would expect in a decent *Star Trek* game are at least included or considered . . . You have an ever-charging supply of power you can either send to the shields or the phasers with the shoulder buttons. A nice feature that did help turn the tide of battle a few times, and was easily and quickly accessible . . . The developers obviously thought the ship combat game was more fun than it actually is, especially when you're forced into every fight and left unable to continue the game until you complete lengthy repairs. Away team missions are either surprisingly short, or laden with irksome platform-switching puzzles and maze searches. I actually enjoyed *25th Anniversary* for the NES more than this, and though that title shares a lot in common with this one, it at least knows how to do puzzles without dragging on." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:

Star Trek has always been one of my favorite franchises. I gladly struggled through *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* game on NES when it came out. To discover that one of my favorite shows was getting its own game on Super Nintendo was pure bliss. After the release of *Star Trek: The Next Generation—"Future's Past"* I was off to the rental store once again. I remember opening the rental case on the way home and looking at the ship and crew on the cover, my excitement growing in anticipation as it would with any young Trekkie.

Turning the game on, I grabbed the controller and sat listening to that familiar and glorious theme song. After reading some text, I maneuvered around the bridge and worked with different sections of the ship. That was as far as I got. Instructions had not come with rentals for some time, so it was up to the games to tell you what you needed to do. Unfortunately, not all games were created equal. At the time, I could not understand the complexity of digging through the planet names to find the one I needed to warp to as I was used to a more simplistic style of game. Needless to say, the cartridge went back to the rental store and never came home with me again.

That is, until I purchased a copy some twenty years later. Video games have grown in complexity over the years and I had grown with them as a player, so when I saw the game for sale I knew I had to give it another chance. The familiar theme song played again just like those years before. Now maybe I could understand the tasks that were required of me to play the game. Unfortunately, ten minutes into the game I hit a wall. I still didn't understand what it wanted from me. Maybe one day I will? – Zoe K. Howard

StarGate

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Probe Software/ Tantalus Entertainment.
Game Type: Platform Shooter/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Based on the 1994 feature film in which an interstellar teleportation device leads to a planet where Egyptian-like people worship the evil god Ra, *StarGate* puts you in the Kurt Russell role of Col. Jonathan "Jack" O'Neil, who runs, jumps, crouches, climbs, hangs on ledges, enters doorways, and shoots enemies. You must work your way through eleven missions (30+ missions when you count sub-missions), including The Desert (battle creatures and Horus guards, search for Daniel Jackson and his men); Catacombs (find O'Neil's men and get supplies to them); Save Sha'uri (find Anubis and destroy him); Ra's Armory (battle Anubis, raid Ra's Armory); and Search and Destroy (destroy the computers in Ra's pyramid).

You are equipped with a machine gun containing unlimited ammo and the ability to upgrade to rapid and wide fire. There are three different grades of ammo: good, better, and best. The gun can overheat, but you can grab gun coolant pickups. You can also pick up extra lives, energy, and grenades. To complete certain missions you must find hieroglyphics and bomb pieces.

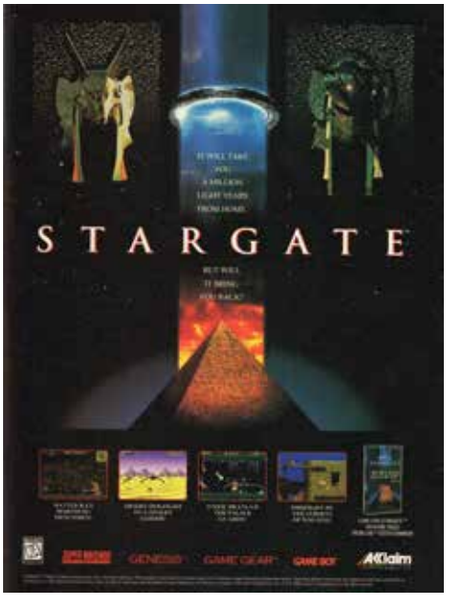
The SNES version of *StarGate* is similar to the Genesis game, but adds Mode 7-enhanced shooter sequences in which you pilot one of Ra's attack gliders, battling Horus flyers, knocking out bunkers on the desert floor, and collecting fuel, shields, and heat-seeking missiles. *StarGate* evokes *Super Star Wars*, but is less linear and not as good. Much different than the Game Boy and Game Gear puzzle games of the same name.

Notable Quotable:

"Funky Arabian beats suitably accompany each level, but the insipid grunts and running noises do little to intensify the action. Regardless, with three difficulty levels and a seemingly unending lineup of missions and sub-missions, this cart will send you happily into combat until your thumbs fall off." – *GamePro* (June 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*StarGate* on the SNES is solid as a rock while the background graphics are a little basic and the music gets very repetitive at times. *StarGate* is strong in every other respect. The game is non-linear (somewhat of a rarity these days), has pin-point control, silky smooth character animation, and an interesting storyline. The programmers at Probe are turning out to be Acclaim's biggest asset . . . *StarGate* is the proof." – *GameFan Magazine* (May 1995)



Steel Talons

Publisher: Left Field Entertainment.
Developer: Panoramic.
Game Type: Flight Combat Simulator, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Adapted from the 1991 Atari Games coin-op semi-classic that featured a two-player cockpit cabinet, *Steel Talons* is a helicopter sim that lets you view the action from behind your chopper or from inside the cockpit. You fly fourteen combat missions (as opposed to nineteen in the arcade game) over deserts, woodlands, and mountains, and in fog, haze, smoke, and darkness, firing a 30 mm cannon and laser-guided missiles at such enemies as tanks, choppers, jet fighters, and missiles.

Missions feature such objectives as destroying all targets in the level within a time limit or following a river while avoiding crashing into canyon walls. Chopper controls include spin left and right, increase and decrease speed, circle left and right, move up and down, fire missiles and guns, and zoom view. The top half of the screen shows the playfield and directional indicators, while the bottom half depicts such readouts as miles per hour, altitude meter, radar (telling you where the enemies are), fuel, and how many missiles remain. The game was also released for the Atari Lynx and Sega Genesis. Each version handled the game's 3D vector polygon graphics differently, and level designs are different.

Notable Quotable:

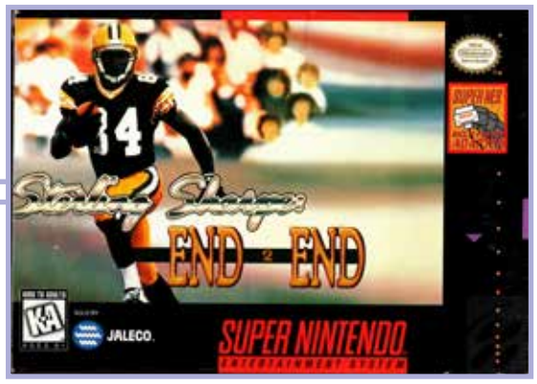
"This has really bad music . . . I wish this thing would steer a little better. It's not as nimble as I'd expect a helicopter to be." – Super Adventures in Gaming (superadventuresingaming.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You can play in training games, fly into enemy territory in combat missions, or go head-to-head against another chopper. Drop in and unload on your targets. This game is a pretty bad simulator. The graphics are horrible, the controls are even worse, and it gets very boring." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1995, Adventure Press)

Sterling Sharpe: End 2 End

Publisher: Jaleco USA.
Developer: Tose.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–5 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.



Viewed from a tilted/overhead vertical perspective, this game has three modes of play: End 2 End (exhibition), Playoff, and All Star. Unfortunately, it lacks a season mode. Sharpe—the only NFL player mentioned in the game—"speaks" text info—some of it humorous—about each of the game's thirty teams (there are also two all-star teams) identified by NFL city name and team color, but not by team names or official logos. Sharpe also compliments gamers after certain good plays.

Although not quite a sterling example of 16-bit football, *Sterling Sharpe: End 2 End* is quickly paced, and as the title suggests, lets the computer and human players pull off plenty of long plays. Other features include instant replays, programmable audibles, a kick meter, two-point conversions, eight-directional wind factor, the substitution of backup quarterbacks, and seventy-one reversible offensive plays. A Japanese version called *Super American Football* was planned but never released.

Fun Fact: Sterling Sharpe was a standout wide receiver for the Green Bay Packers, leading the NFL in receptions in 1989, 1992, and 1993, and making the Pro Bowl five times. His career began in 1988, but was derailed by a neck injury in 1994, meaning he had retired by the time *Sterling Sharpe: End 2 End* hit store shelves.

Notable Quotable:

"Very poor play control and a terrible play book." – *Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"Aside from the license, *End 2 End* doesn't offer gridiron fans anything they haven't seen before." – *Game Players* (May 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"If *End 2 End* were a first-generation football sim, it might be a decent contender. But in today's competitive market, *End 2 End* gets knocked aside by more advanced competition." – *GamePro* (May 1995)

Stone Protectors

Publisher: Kemco.
Developer: Eurocom Entertainment Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Based on the action figure line and the 1993 syndicated animated series that ran for just thirteen episodes, *Stone Protectors* is a side-scrolling beat-'em-up similar to such better-known games as *Battletoads*, *Final Fight*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. Each playable, troll-like character—Angus, Chester, Clifford, Cornelius, and Maxwell—can punch, kick, and jump, and each uses different weapons, such as guns, grenades, bazookas, swords, flamethrowers, and/or shurikens.

In addition, each character can pull off special moves, such as keyboard smart bomb, supersonic rush, or rock pick swing. You can hold down a button for charged special attacks. Musical moves, including keyboard smart bombs, saxophone twisters, and fireball drum solos, set the game apart from the pack. The action takes place in ten different locations, including the beach, the forest, caves, and a snowy village. A second player—or a computer-controlled ally—can also join in as a co-op partner. The creatures you battle are minions of Zok, the leader of the Saurians.

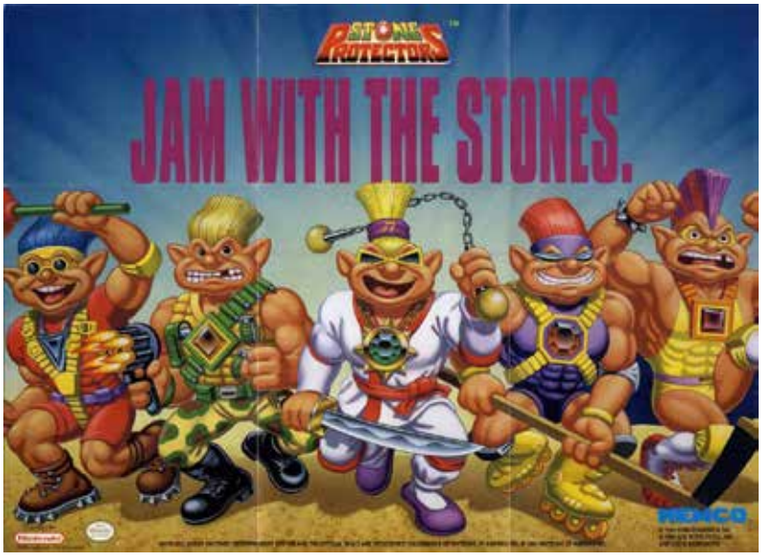
Despite questionable licensing and a few quibbling faults (such as redundant troll and lizard-esque enemies), *Stone Protectors* is fun to play and has nice, jazzy music and strong sound effects. The cartoonish graphics are colorful and rich. A Genesis version was developed but not officially released, though you can find the ROM online.

Notable Quotable:

"If this game weren't associated with the troll doll phenomena and started with an original premise, then you may have something with a little integrity as it is a fun, obscure little gem." – Michael A. Jones (retrowaretv.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are crisp and well defined, and the collision detection is right on the money . . . Each character has a ton of kicks, punches, special moves, throws, and even weapons . . . The stages take place in diverse but repetitive environments . . . The non-stop fighting is fun for a while, but sometimes it seems like the waves of enemies will never end! I also don't like how only certain characters can pick up particular weapons. It's not for everyone, but if you enjoy this type of game, *Stone Protectors* is worth your while." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Street Combat

Publisher: Irem.
Developer: Irem.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

With its clunky animation, crude sound effects, small characters, and simplistic controls, *Street Combat*—an Americanized version of Japan's *Ranma ½: Chounai Gekitou Hen* for the Super Famicom—is a poor cousin to (i.e., lame knockoff of) *Street Fighter II*. Two-player mode lets gamers control any of the eight available fighters, including Dozo the clown, who can throw balls and swing clubs; and Helmut the robot, who is equipped with a chain and bombs.

In one-player mode, gamers must control civilian Steven, who can do rolling elbow strikes; or armored Steven, who can do rolling kicks. Fighting moves include the typical assortment of punches, kicks, and special moves, but a lightning arm maneuver makes the solo mode far too easy. Fighters can also block. Taking place on city streets, in a wrestling ring, through the jungle, in gritty back alleys, on top of a truck, and other locales, *Street Combat* lacks the humor and blood-curdling screams of *Ranma ½: Chounai Gekitou Hen*. Also the characters have been redrawn, and two of the three women were replaced by men. Similar to *Doomsday Warrior*.

Fun Fact: Written and illustrated by Rumiko Takahashi, *Ranma ½* was originally serialized in *Weekly Shōnen Sunday* from 1987–1996. It was followed by cartoons and films. The overarching storyline chronicles the adventures of a teenage boy martial artist named Ranma Saotome, who becomes a girl when he is splashed with cold water (hot water changes him back to a boy).

Notable Quotable:
"*Street Combat* is a horrific fighting game . . . it sucks like a Joel Schumacher *Batman* movie or Jar Jar [Binks] . . . it belongs next to crap like *Fighting Masters* on the Genesis." – Lord Karnage (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"I can't fathom how a respectable video game developer like Irem (of *R-Type* fame) could produce such a heinous piece of garbage . . . *Street Combat*'s queer graphics, creepy animation, and bouncy music will make you cringe. The main character (Steven) looks like a girl, and when he's defeated he spreads his legs or sticks his butt up into the air . . . *Street Combat* is arguably the worst one-on-one fighting game ever made!" – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
Being an anime fan in the early 1990s wasn't easy. You had to deal with overpriced import merchandise (when you could find it), the officially licensed videos and laserdiscs were extremely limited in selection, and worst of all, the English localizations of what *did* make it over were more often than not painful to behold. Japanese Super Famicom games brought to the States were no different in this aspect, and *Street Combat* may be one of the most egregious examples of bad localization ever seen. What began as a somewhat serviceable fighting game based on Rumiko Takahashi's hit Japanese manga *Ranma ½* ended up as an oddly redesigned brawler bereft of the charm and style that permeated the source material.

To begin with, every single character in the game was redesigned, and some very questionable choices were made on that front. The original plot was jettisoned in favor of a bog-standard "win the tournament!" storyline. Finally, the soundtrack was changed from top to bottom. Unfortunately, this is what we had to deal with, so deal with it we did. While I understand the reasons why the changes were made, the alterations made for a lower quality product in the end. Fortunately, the comics and anime for *Ranma ½* did make it stateside soon after *Street Combat* was released, so the next Super Nintendo iteration we received arrived intact.

With the proliferation of Japanese manga and anime in today's pop culture scene, the need to make radical changes to imported games has thankfully subsided. Hopefully we will not see this kind of thing happen again.
– Thor Thorvaldson

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

With *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, Capcom did a masterful job of cramming their 58-megabit arcade game (from 1991) into a 16-meg Super NES cartridge. The action is fast and hard-hitting with little slowdown, and a number of extras were added, including a handicapping feature for two-player games. There are missing elements, but they are relatively insignificant. Thanks to Nintendo's family-friendly policies the blood has been changed to a gray substance (supposedly sweat), and Chun Li's moves are not as provocative. In addition, a few background animations, character voices, and minor moves did not make the cut. Nevertheless, this home rendition is a remarkable achievement.

As fans of the franchise know, gameplay consists of one-on-one battles between eight now-iconic characters, each of whom pulls off special moves when you input specific button combinations: Ryu (fireball, dragon punch, hurricane kick), E. Honda (hundred hand slap, sumo headbutt), Blanka (electricity, rolling attack), Guile (sonic boom, flash kick), Ken (same as Ryu), Chun Li (lightning kick, whirlwind kick), Zangief (spinning clothesline, spinning piledriver), and Dhalsim (yoga fire, yoga flame). The most famous move is Ken and Ryu's fireball, where they yell "HA-DO-KEN." E. Honda's hundred hand slap is well-known for its power. Each character also has several close throw and hold attacks, and each can crouch, jump, flip, block, and do light, medium, and hard punches and kicks. The fighters handle extremely well as the controls are excellent.

In a one-player Tournament, you select a character and fight each of the other seven playable characters in best two-out-of-three matches, then move on to four boss characters: Balrog, Vega, Sagat, and M. Bison. In the Vs. Battle mode you fight another player, and the computer will keep track of each character's wins, losses, and special KOs. You can select your character and the stage where you will do battle. Each fighter has an energy meter at the top of the screen that is reduced each time the opponent connects with an attack. When a player's meter runs out the other gamer scores a KO. You can play the game with the 99-second timer turned on or off.

A much more popular game than the original *Street Fighter*—which hit the arcades in 1987—*Street Fighter II* remains a favorite among arcade and console gamers, and it spawned numerous sequels, including the brilliant *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting*, another coin-op and SNES favorite.

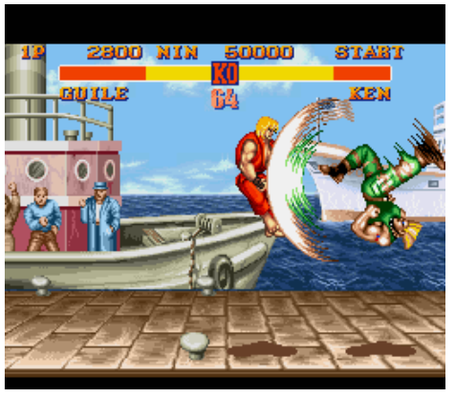
Notable Quotable:

"*Street Fighter II*'s graphics sizzle . . . All the smooth action animations, the great multi-scrolling landscapes, and the beautiful color shading must be seen to be believed . . . *SF II* music maniacs will get a jolt out of the new, re-scored soundtracks. Based on a Japanese collection of *Street Fighter II* tunes, the background selections have great-sounding beats. The effects are at times less than arcade quality and some voices are missing, but they're still superb by home standards." – *GamePro* (August 1992)

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior

Notable Quotable:

"What surely must be the greatest ever arcade machine has become the greatest ever arcade-to-console conversion. It truly is mind-bogglingly good! Apart from a few minuscule differences—none of which affect the gameplay in the slightest—this IS *Street Fighter II*. The sound, sprites, animated backgrounds, and gameplay are all spot-on, so much so that once you're used to playing with the Super Nintendo control pads (which doesn't take long since you can select which buttons do what), you actually think you're playing the arcade game! All your favorite tactics work, everything reacts in the same way, all the moves are present . . . everything is perfect! Incredibly, Capcom have also added some new features not present in the arcade machine—a new bonus screen and a whole load of options which allow you to handicap yourself or other players, select the background, and change the difficulty settings." – *Mean Machines* (July 1992)



Insider Insight:

I remember being very impressed with how close to the arcade the Super Nintendo version of *Street Fighter II* was. All of the characters were there, and the sounds were close to the original. The gameplay was great, and the fact that I was not pumping quarter after quarter into an arcade machine was the best part! The only disappointment was the controller. With four face buttons, the SNES controller just never felt right for *Street Fighter II*. But a couple friends and I were able to solve this in a somewhat unorthodox manner. We decided to make our own fight stick, something rather uncommon in the early '90s console scene.

In all the time we had spent playing at the local arcade, we made friends with the tech that kept the games running. That gave us a source for real arcade buttons and a joystick. It was simple enough to open up a Super Nintendo controller and solder wires to the buttons. But when it came to how to house all of this, we were not in a position to do anything good. In fact, we had no way to cut or assemble any kind of durable material, so we settled on a cardboard box covered in tape! Surprisingly, it lasted the duration of our college years and I assume somewhat beyond. Looking back, I realize this was my first pad hack, and while it was not pretty, whomever was using it had a great advantage over the poor player with the stock Super Nintendo controller! – Darren Sulfridge

Insider Insight:

Street Fighter II: The World Warrior was the reason I finally broke down and bought a Super Nintendo. Sure, I had been dazzled by *ActRaiser* and *Contra III* when I played them at my friend Scott's house in early 1992, but it was the possibility of bringing Ryu and friends home that compelled me to plunk down my own hard-earned cash on that sweltering July evening.

I had fallen in love with the game the previous summer in the boardwalk arcades of the Jersey shore. It became the de facto way for me and my friends to wind down the evening after our (mostly unsuccessful) endeavors to meet young ladies. It is kind of sad to say that I got further with pixelated Chun Li than I did with a living, breathing female, but hey, that's life sometimes.

The SNES version of the game was a marvel: as close to arcade perfect as I had seen a home system reproduce up until that time (*Golden Axe* on the Genesis would be a close second). The only real difference was using the SNES game pad rather than a joystick, but soon enough I was ripping off sonic booms, spinning bird kicks, and doing dragon punches with the greatest of ease.

Again, this rather simple game about two people kicking the crap out of each other became a social touchstone for me and my buddy, Scott, as we would inevitably challenge each other (me playing as Guile and him playing as Chun Li) any and every chance we got. My most vivid memory of the game comes courtesy of my youngest brother, Mike, who simply could not beat the third-to-last boss, Vega. Every time he squared off against that preening matador from Hell a litany of rather creative insults and expletives would fill the house and the ceiling would, quite literally, shake as he slammed his feet on the floor of my bedroom in a fit of absolute rage.

Now, if that kind of a visceral response is not the sign of a completely awesome video game then I don't know what is. – Jerry Bonner

Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

An excellent port of the 1992 arcade game of the same name, *Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting* offers essentially the same fighting action as *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*, but you can now adjust the speed of the game from 1 to 10 stars, making the fights faster and more intense. You can also play as one of the four bosses, increasing the number of playable fighters from eight to twelve.

Fighters include Ryu (Shotokan karate), E. Honda (sumo wrestler), Blanka (jungle fighter), Guile (special forces), Ken (Shotokan karate), Chun Li (kung fu), Zangief (wrestler), Dhalsim (yoga), Balrog (boxer), Vega (Spanish ninjitsu), Sagat (Muay Thai), and M. Bison (unknown fighting style). Each character can crouch, jump, flip, and block, and do light, medium, and hard punches and kicks, and each has several close throw and hold attacks.

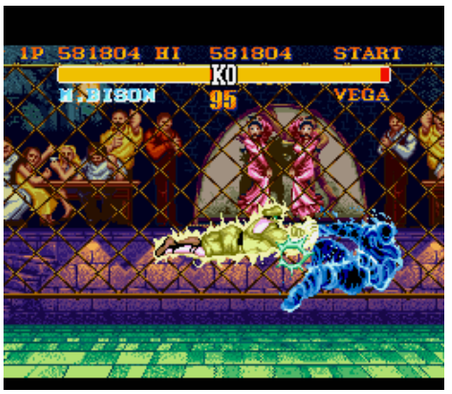
In addition, if you input certain button combinations the characters can execute special moves. Boss special moves include turn punch and dash punch for Balrog; claw dive, wall leap, and claw roll for Vega; tiger uppercut, tiger knee, and tiger shot for Sagat; and psycho crusher, scissor kick, and head stomp for M. Bison. The others have such special moves as fireball, hurricane kick, hundred hand slap, rolling attack, lightning kick, whirlwind kick, or spinning clothesline. The following characters have special moves they could not do in *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*: E. Honda (sumo smash), Blanka (vertical rolling attack), Chun Li (fireball), Zangief (turbo spinning clothesline), and Dhalsim (yoga teleport, where he can instantly teleport himself in front of or behind his opponent). Plus Ryu and Ken can now perform the hurricane kick in mid-air.

You pick one of the twelve warriors and battle each of the others in a series of one-on-one, best-two-out-of-three fights until only you remain. Or you can battle a second gamer in Vs. Battle mode, where the computer will keep track of each character's wins, losses, and special KOs. You can select your character and the stage where you will do battle. Each fighter has an energy meter at the top of the screen that is reduced each time the opponent connects with an attack. When a player's meter runs out, the other gamer scores a KO. You can handicap two-player matches, configure the difficulty of the computer opponent, and play the game with the 99-second timer turned on or off.

Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting never made it to the Genesis; fans of that console instead got a port of *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition*, which Capcom released to the arcades in 1992.

Notable Quotable:

"A brilliant conversion and everything a *Turbo* fan could have hoped for. One of the best games ever to grace the Super NES, but



Street Fighter II Turbo: Hyper Fighting

do you want to pay extra for a handful of extras?" – *Nintendo Magazine System* (1993)

Notable Quotable:

"All of the fighters look sharp in their *Turbo* colors. Though most of the animation is unchanged, several characters—particularly E. Honda—have many new frames of action, even in basic movements. The scenery is similarly buffed-up, with bats hovering in the rooftops of Ryu's stage and more cheerleading onlookers on the boat in Ken's stage . . . there are many new sound samples . . . Capcom has taken its most outstanding title and made it even more outstanding." – *VideoGames* (September 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"A genuine pain to use the Super NES's control pad . . . it's just not the ideal layout for fighting games. If you have a joystick, however, then you'll be able to pull off moves like dragon punches with the grace of a true master. All in all, the game is a great conversion of the arcade game and adds to the fun of the original classic. Yet it's not the great leap forward you might expect from a sequel, since it's essentially the same game with a few more features—features that should have been easily programmed into the first title. While *Street Fighter II: Turbo* is the better game because of these improvements, some may not feel that they are enough to warrant another purchase. One thing is clear, however. If you've somehow missed out on the first game, this is a must-have title which represents the very best in the genre." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:

I should have known better. I am about as non-confrontational as they come, so when Brett, my dear boyfriend, suggested we play a fighting game together, I should have coyly demurred. I could have suggested a less antagonistic title, but buoyed by the fun we had playing *The Simpsons* beat-'em-up in the arcades, I figured it could be cathartic to relieve some tension. I thought it would be a good way to spend time with my love, and besides, it is just a game.

I thought wrong.

Once I became Chun Li staring down her sumo-sized opponent, losing was not an option. I had no use for strategy, no time to learn which buttons did what. Learning curve? Pffft! I hit every button as fast as I could. Punch! Kick! Spin! Dodge! An accidental whirlwind kick! A how-did-I-do-that fireball! Somehow, in spite of my ignorance and poor coordination, Chun Li managed to best E. Honda in our first round. If I could beat Brett with my chaotic, all-out random assault on the controller, then that old theorem about a million monkeys typing the works of Shakespeare just might be true. This win was my *Hamlet*.

I should have known there was no way my victory was anything but dumb luck, that a repeat was against the odds. I should have set the controller down and called it a night, but super competitive (and slightly chagrined) Brett wanted to play out the match. In the next rounds he easily knocked me out. He had the nerve to again and again pummel me—I mean Chun Li.

If Brett is super competitive, then I am hyper competitive. Even though I *knew* he knew the game better, and even though I *knew* he had far better eye-hand coordination, this loss was a gut punch, or more accurately, a "hundred hand slap."

I did not take it well. Seeing my frustration, Brett kindly offered that we handicap the game to give Chun Li an advantage against her opponent. That feature is made for uneven matchups like ours, right? Unfortunately for my on-screen avatar, my competitive nature did not take kindly to his gracious offer. I wanted to *win*—no asterisks.

So when I lost yet again, my grief bypassed denial and flew directly to anger. Then the tears came—buckets of tears! Brett tried to soothe me. His face, flush with the thrill of victory, provided no comfort for my reddened cheeks. How could he so relentlessly and rudely beat me at this dumb game? And how could he so thoughtlessly offer to help me win?

My sweet boyfriend was in a no-win situation, as was I. Fortunately, my love for Brett and for gaming did not end that night. Cooperative games allowed us to combine our efforts and work with instead of against each other. I could lean on his expertise to help us both win. It turns out we make a pretty good team. Love, not to mention *Donkey Kong Country*, indeed conquers all.

Decades after our wedding, Brett will sometimes ask if I am ready to give *Street Fighter II* another try. I could succumb to my competitive nature and go for it, but remembering my bruised ego and battered Chun Li, I coyly demur. Now I know better. – Charis Weiss

Street Fighter Alpha 2

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1996.

Retaining all the combos, moves, and characters from its arcade counterpart—released earlier the same year—*Street Fighter Alpha 2* lets you play as Sakura (street fighter), Rolento (commando), Chun Li (kung fu), Gen (fights barehanded), Ken (Shotokan karate), Birdie (punk club bouncer), Katana (called Sodom in the original), Adon (Muay Thai master), Guy (ninjitsu), Dhalsim (yoga), Zangief (wrestler), Akuma (Satsui no Hado), Rose (soul power), M. Bison (unknown fighting style), Sagat (former bodyguard for M. Bison), Charlie (elite military team member), or Dan (self-taught martial artist). Sakura, a Japanese schoolgirl street fighter, and Rolento, a Mad Gear gang member from *Final Fight*, made their series debut in the coin-op game, and Gen, who debuted in the original *Street Fighter* (1987), is now playable.

Each character can crouch, jump, flip, block, and do weak, medium, and strong punches and kicks, and each has several close throw and grab attacks. In addition, each character can pull off a wide variety of special moves executed by inputting specific button combinations. Depending on the character this includes fireball, hurricane kick, dragon punch, mine sweeper, lightning kick, foreword roll, bandit chain, jaguar tooth, yoga flame, and/or atomic suplex. Other moves include alpha counters (a predetermined special attack that will block your opponent's attack), air blocking, fall breaking, and the super combo gauge. Each time you execute a move your super combo gauge builds up, and when the gauge reaches certain points you can perform custom combos, super combos, and alpha counter moves.

Arcade mode lets you pick a fighter and battle your way, one at a time, through eight computer-controlled opponents. VS Mode pits you against another player, and you can even fight as the same character. Options include number of rounds, difficulty level, sound (mono or stereo), game speed, time limit per round, and damage (1–4), which determines how much damage you receive and inflict with each blow. As with *Street Fighter II* and various other games in the franchise, you fight amidst various partially animated backgrounds, in this case boats, buildings, water, an airplane, elephants, mountains, and more.

Street Fighter Alpha 2 was also ported to the PlayStation and Saturn. Followed by *Street Fighter Alpha 3* (arcade, various).

Notable Quotable:

"The moves are a snap to execute, thanks to responsive controls. The only drawback is that the fights are slow, even on the game's fastest turbo setting. Flaws aside, *SFA2* is a good fighting game that remains (for the most part) faithful to its arcade counterpart." – *GamePro* (February 1997)

Notable Quotable:

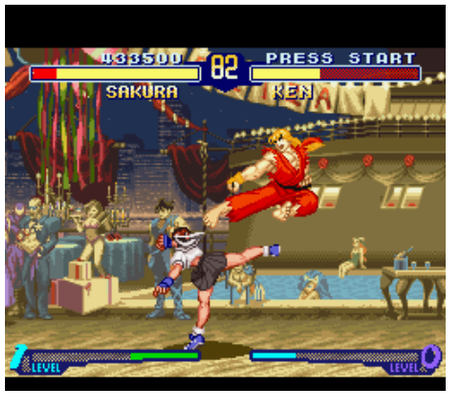
"There are just certain games that shouldn't be made on the 16-bitters. Sure, they tried pretty hard and came relatively close, but overall *SFA2* on the Super NES is more of a chore than anything else. There's a slight load time right before the battle, and the sound sounds like it's playing through a coffee can—a poor-quality coffee can at that . . . The graphics were good but the poor control pretty much negated that. Speaking of poor control, I think back to *Super SF2* and remember how well that played compared to this one." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1997)

Notable Quotable:

"Every character from the arcade version has been crammed into this 32-meg cart at the sacrifice of massive chunks of animation. The resolution has also taken a hit, but unless you're nit-picking, you can't really argue considering the console . . . The size of the characters is also mediocre, maybe just a hint bigger than the fighters in the SNES port of

Street Fighter Alpha 2

SFII. All of this could be acceptable if the speed of this game was faster . . . hardly playable for any level of gamer. Not even the fastest turbo setting helps . . . Adding to the speed problems are the strangely out of place load times. Right after the announcer screams "fight," the game stops for a good 2–3 seconds while it loads . . . The soundtrack is outstanding, featuring re-mixed tracks of all the classics we know and love from the original series." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)



Insider Insight:
There was always that one kid—you know the one. He had the latest video game system, usually before the rest of us even knew it was out. You could count on him having the latest games and telling everyone else about it.

I never was that kid.

On the contrary, I usually had the previous generation console, found at a garage sale or flea market. But that was all right, since it gave me the chance to enjoy the best games at the best prices. For only a few dollars more than the cost to rent a game from Blockbuster Video (yes, I just dated myself there) I picked up top-tier games for the Super Nintendo, including such titles as *Super Mario Kart* and *EarthBound*.

I was shocked when I came across *Street Fighter Alpha 2* in the local Blockbuster discount bin for a paltry seven dollars, but I quickly scooped it up and took it home. I was completely unaware that this game was even coming out for the system!

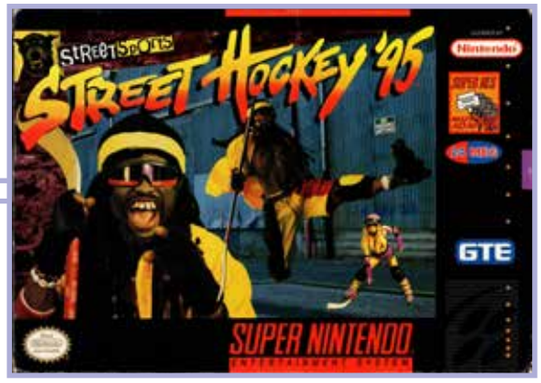
Reminding myself that I was still on the SNES while many of my friends were playing the same game on the next-gen Sony PlayStation, I did my best to keep my expectations under control. I popped the cartridge into my faithful old Nintendo console, flicked the power switch, and held my breath.

The game looked incredible. But here I was in 1997, playing the latest *Street Fighter* game on my Super Nintendo, and just like the PlayStation version, the SNES port included . . . load times? Yes, before each fight there was an awkward pause, followed by another while loading took place. None of this mattered to me, since I was kicking butt and taking names with Sakura on a system that I actually owned!

While it never saw the epic, late-night battles with friends that my copy of *Killer Instinct* or *Super Street Fighter II* experienced, *Street Fighter Alpha 2* will always have a special place in my heart, and in my SNES collection. – Jon D. Harrison

Street Hockey '95

Publisher: GTE Entertainment.
Developer: GTE Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Take the hockey off the ice and into the urban jungle with *Street Hockey '95*. Players wear rollerblades instead of ice skates, and the three-on-three action takes place in six different locations (each with such features as obstacles and ramps), including an empty swimming pool, a night club, and a construction site. The action scrolls horizontally to show the entire court. Gamers can select from nine different skaters to form their teams (each with their own style and strengths), and there are five game modes: Fat Point, Rush, Whack, Crammit, and Hot Puck, each with unique rules, scoring system, and time limit.

The back of the box boasts that the game has 24 megs of digitized graphics and sounds and 2,200 frames of digitized animations. It also advises players to: "Get enough air to show up on radar. Nail that unblockable slap shot top-shelf in the corner. Or combine a knee-stop with a no-look pass if you can hang." Three levels of game intensity are available: slack off, hype around, and blow out. There was no sequel to the game, but GTE did release the basketball equivalent in *Jammit* for the SNES.

Fun Fact: The Angry Video Game Nerd did a video about the bad cover art for *Street Hockey '95*. In the video, he said: "Let me guess, they didn't know if it was going to be a fighting game or a hockey game . . . This is like MTV regurgitated all over a Super Nintendo box. I don't get any of this!"

Notable Quotable:
"Although games like *NHL '95* provide more realistic hockey, *Street Hockey* shows off what really goes down every day on the streets. *SH '95* is a decent walk on hockey's wild side." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The controls are slippery as hell . . . I was flopping around like a fish on the beach . . . they did a great job with the voices. Everything sounds clear as a bell, but the guts of this game are just not good. There're some nice ideas here . . . but if you don't get the actual hockey gameplay right, then what's the point?" – SNES drunk (YouTube).

Notable Quotable:
"*Street Hockey '95* tried to capitalize on the fad of roller hockey sweeping the continent at the time . . . it featured no known players or team, instead focusing on digitized actors in the style of *Mortal Kombat*. These characters have names and personalities that personify the '90s tendency to give everyone and everything an attitude, and were probably at the time referred to as 'radical.' There's the guy with the plaid shirt hanging around his waist and the neon spandex-covered ninja. They're a cool-looking bunch." – Guy Desmarais (www.thegamer.com)

Street Racer

Publisher: Ubi Soft.
Developer: Vivid Image.
Game Type: Go-Kart Racing, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

One of countless *Super Mario Kart* clones, *Street Racer* puts an interesting twist on the go-kart genre by giving characters fighting game-like abilities. Instead of driving over and collecting an assortment of random weapons, each of the game's eight racers comes equipped with a right attack, a left attack, and two special moves. For example, Hodja levitates over opponents with his magic carpet, while Raphael's amped-up stereo system blows away anyone he gets near. After activating a special move, players must wait for a recharge period to do it again.

After suffering damage from an enemy attack or one of the many bombs littering the streets, you can grab toolkit icons that appear on the tracks to restore your vehicle. You can also pick up blue boost icons that can be stored up and used as needed, and you can collect stars that provide a bonus point to the racer who ends up with the most after a race. Bonus points can also be earned through such feats as lapping an opponent or being deemed the most aggressive driver. Another feature is that your car can hop over bombs and through rough terrain.

In addition to standard track racing there is Rumble mode, in which racers drive around an arena, trying to knock each other out; and Soccer mode, an inventive game in which players use their kart to bump the ball into a goal. Four-player split-screen action (via multi-tap adaptor) is available. Featuring fast game-play, realistic sound effects, a rocking soundtrack, and fantastic graphics, *Street Racer* is one of the better go-kart games for any system. It was also released for the Game Boy and PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:
"This is one fast-paced, comical racing game . . . The driving perspective runs smoothly, with great sounds in the background. Tons of great tracks to race on. Cool game." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Unfortunately, *Street Racer* isn't perfect. The characters aren't quite as cool as those in *Mario Kart,* and the game's graphics just aren't as soothing. But, if you want to have a party, get yourself *Street Racer*, a multi-tap, and some extra controllers. Just remember when you're having fun not to spill anything on the carpet." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Though its source of inspiration is almost embarrassingly obvious, to immediately dismiss *Street Racer* as a drastically inferior rip-off would be unfair. The developers have certainly brought some of their own ideas to the table, and by offering a decent amount of options to play with and a combination of colorful visuals, wacky characters, and slick racing, *Street Racer* is a solid alternative for those who've grown tired of *Super Mario Kart*. You just might want to grab a few friends first though, as the very nature of the game tends to render the one-player experience slightly shallow. A quick blast of fun, but don't expect to remain hooked for hours on end." – Andrew Donaldson (www.nintendolife.com)

Insider Insight:
Even before the relative explosion in kart racing games, there was a general wariness towards poorly designed clones of *Super Mario Kart*. How could they possibly come close to the original? Fortunately, *Street Racer* not only did a good job with its kart racing mechanics, large selection of tracks, top-notch audio visuals, and specialized characters, but also one-upped the subgenre's originator by adding four-player support. Finally, a great use of my Super Multitap! Perhaps just as important as bringing more players into the action—and something that a lot of *Super Mario Kart* knock-offs did not even bother with—were the fun mini-games. My personal favorite was the Soccer mini-game, where you used your kart to try and bump an oversized soccer ball into your opponent's net. This was easier said than done on a pitch packed with opponents trying to steal the ball and do the same. It was crazy fun, though, and a game mode I wish would be re-introduced into modern games! – Bill Loguidice

Strike Gunner S.T.G.

Publisher: NTV International Corporation.
Developer: Athena.
Game Type: Vertical Scrolling Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Ridding the world of nuclear weapons is a bad idea, according to the storyline for *Strike Gunner S.T.G.*, which finds the nations of Earth vulnerable to alien attack because of said nuclear disarmament. This sets the stage for a bland, repetitious shooter where you fly your ship over such standard terrain as forests, deserts, snow, and the sea, shooting rapid-fire lasers at helicopters, jets, gun turrets, and the like. There is a level set in outer space as well. The standard enemies move in predictable patterns, but there are also giant bosses to battle, including an airship, an aircraft carrier, and a desert tank.

When you begin the game, you can select from fifteen different special weapons: plasma shield, homing missile, atomic missile, laser cannon, mega-beam cannon, anti-air mines, sonic wave, sonic shooter, spray missile, photon torpedo, comrade fighter, adhesive bombs, heavy Vulcan, and auto-aim Vulcan. After you complete a stage, the special weapon you used is no longer available for the rest of the game. At the beginning of each stage you will select from the special weapons that are left. You can use the special weapon within the level until a red energy meter on the left side of the screen disappears completely.

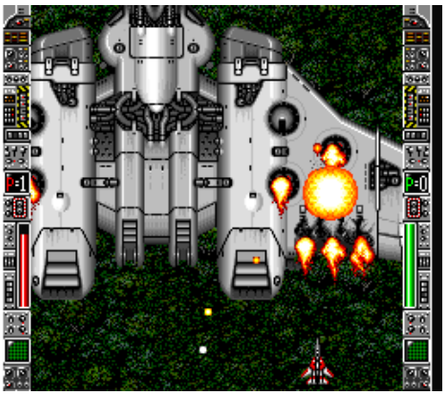
A two-player simultaneous mode is a welcome feature in most any shooter, but unfortunately, it is plagued by slowdown here. Auto-fire is a plus, as are customizable difficulty levels, in this playable but unremarkable game. *Strike Gunner S.T.G.* is based on Tecmo's arcade game of the same name also released in 1991. The console version added five special weapons: mega-beam cannon, sonic shooter, adhesive bombs, heavy Vulcan, and heat arrow. In addition, the final boss was redesigned and made easier to defeat. Released in Europe as *Super Strike Gunner*.

Notable Quotable:

"A very basic overhead shooter." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"A couple [of the] boss fights were pretty intense . . . way too much of the game's eight stages just seemed to meander by at a snail's pace, while the regular waves of enemies were predictable in their movements and, in general, non-threatening. While some of the background graphics did look quite nice by early SNES standards, the overall lack of variety in them just added to the tedium. When most stages are fairly lengthy and scroll by slowly, getting nearly two full levels of flying over a forest and even more time spent meandering through (essentially) the same outer space design is about enough to cure insomnia." – Rob Hamilton (www.honestgamers.com)



Stunt Race FX

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo/Argonaut Software.
Game Type: 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

The second game augmented with Nintendo's Super FX chip (*Star Fox* was the first), *Stunt Racer FX* has polygonal graphics and five cartoonish vehicles: 4WD, which has huge tires and is good for stunt driving; Coupe, which has tight steering and a low boost meter consumption rate; F-Type, which turns quickly, is fast, and controls easily; 2WD, a speedy motorcycle; and Trailer, a semi-truck that is only available in the Bonus Game. Modes of play include Test Run (practice); Speed Trax (qualify for each upcoming race by reaching checkpoints, collect items to restore damage); Stunt Trax (complete obstacle-filled courses while collecting stars); Free Trax (unlockable by beating either novice class or expert class in Speed Trax); and Battle Trax (two-player split-screen racing with no CPU opponents).

Viewing the action from the cockpit or behind your car, you speed down twisting, turning tracks, through tunnels, beside mountains, over bridges and jumps, and more. Running into obstacles and cars and over rough road will damage your vehicle. If your damage meter gets full, your car will explode. The polygonal graphics—complete with pop-up—are dated, but there is variety in the courses, which include Easy Ride, Aqua Tunnel, Sunset Valley, Night Owl, King's Forest, Sea Breeze, White Land, Night Cruise, Rock Field, Up 'N Down, Ice Dance, and Blue Lake. Known in Japan as *Wild Trax*.

Notable Quotable:

"Another 'cute' Nintendo title? Obviously you haven't had your hands on the wheel in *Stunt Race FX*! This game kicks! The play control is out of this world! The attention to detail is truly superior . . . in the master tracks (cockpit view) rain not only beads up on your windshield, but the screen becomes properly distorted within each individual droplet of water! The play control may take some time to become accustomed to, but take the time—it's worth it! The bonus levels and the motorcycle are a blast, too!" – *Game Zero* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Nintendo's second FX chip-based game isn't as good as I expected. It just didn't seem to have the overall fun that *Star Fox* did. It features four racers that have noticeably different handling characteristics so the purists among you will be happy. The variety of tracks also prove to be challenging. However, the game feels awkward with the touchy steering, and the feeling of speed just isn't there. Overall, there are better racing games on the market. It's just too bad since I had high expectations for it." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1994)

Insider Insight:
After *Star Fox*, I was so sold on the Super FX chip that I could not wait to hop into Nintendo's next polygonal masterpiece, and *Stunt Race FX* did not disappoint. Sure, the framerate was abysmal at best, but once I got the hang of how it controlled, I couldn't put it down. I used to bring my copy over to my friend Joe Charles's house and we would play it for hours on end. We were never quite able to clear the expert courses, but that did not stop us from spending countless hours trying to unlock the motorcycle, mastering the tractor-trailer bonus rounds, and oddly enough, watching the pause screen. No exaggeration—we used to pause the game and just watch that little cartoon car animation go for minutes at a time.

That is what's so great about *Stunt Race FX*. Much like *Star Fox*, it is more than just the "futuristic" polygonal graphics that—let's be honest—have not aged very well. They created a charming world with fun cartoon car designs (especially on the claymation-style box art), great track designs, and incredibly catchy music. *Stunt Race FX* is full of pure Nintendo charm, and it is not to be missed.

Sadly, Joe passed away in November 2017. He was one of the most fascinating people I have ever met, and I have a ton of great memories with the guy, but among my favorites are the afternoons we spent playing *Stunt Race FX*. The game may be mostly remembered today for its blocky graphics and choppy framerate, but for me, it will always remind me of summer days playing Super Nintendo at the Charles house. Rest in peace, Joe. – Kris Randazzo

Sunset Riders

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Despite the absence of a four-player mode, *Sunset Riders* for the SNES is a nice port of Konami's 1991 "Cowboy *Contra*" run-and-gun arcade game. It features all four playable characters—Steve (pistol), Billy (pistol), Bob (shotgun), and Cormano (shotgun)—each of whom walks, jumps, and shoots through eight hectic, yet colorful levels of Old West action. While battling the baddies, including bandits and corrupt cowboys, you can grab sheriff's badge power-ups for double shots and rapid fire. As with *Contra*, you can shoot right, left, up, down, and diagonally. You can also pick up and throw dynamite, slide under enemy fire, and enter doors to grab bonuses.

The game has many of the trappings of the Old West and is highly interactive within that context. You will ride a horse, jump over logs, avoid and run on top of a stampede, shoot bad guys that are in the back of a moving, covered wagon, avoid enemy fire coming from a moving locomotive, ride atop said locomotive, walk up a mountain trail while jumping over boulders, and more. Guys with names like Simon Greedwell and Chief Scalpem appear as bosses, and there are first person shooting gallery type scenarios where you will aim and fire at bad guys that pop up. A second gamer can join in for co-op action. Difficulty levels include easy, normal, and hard. The Genesis version adds a non-scrolling two-player Versus mode where players shoot at each other until one runs out of health.

Notable Quotable:

"This version is almost identical to the arcade version, so longtime fans should definitely check this one out! Being a one-hit wonder does get a bit frustrating, but the two-player simultaneous mode is a blast. A Konami winner!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Sunset Riders* is the ultimate item of cowboy glamorization, where the good guys ride across barren deserts and explore small towns, blowing away hundreds of bandits popping out of saloons and runaway trains with explosive weaponry. A perfect atmosphere is the big selling point, covering the Old West theme with exciting music, vibrant scenery, and cornball silliness . . . a hilarious duck-and-dodge adventure, with both extremely breezy and painfully tough stretches." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The 1991 arcade game has graphical details, an influx of sprites, more clear speech, and minor gameplay additions which were just beyond the reach of the SNES hardware capabilities . . . what is far more important is that the heart of the arcade game beats within the SNES cart. It is a much more accurate portrayal of the arcade's level layouts and playability than the Mega Drive [Genesis] version, plus it is still far from ugly . . . SNES *Sunset Riders* is also consciously politically correct, with any arcade instances of liquor swigging, harlot snogging, and Native American tribe battling being removed in the conversion." – Jamie O'Neill (www.nintendolife.com)

Insider Insight:
Some of my all-time favorite memories hanging out in the arcades as a kid are when I would team up with three friends and play through *Sunset Riders*. It is perhaps my all-time favorite Konami arcade game, sitting right up there with the company's other multiplayer arcade classics at the time like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *X-Men*, and *The Simpsons*. Konami was simply amazing in the '90s!

What I absolutely loved about *Sunset Riders* was the cowboy western-themed gameplay that not only offered fantastic shooting action (you could compare it to *Contra*; the director worked on both series), but also loads of over-the-top moments that made the entire experience a riot. For example, you would avoid getting trampled by stampeding cattle by sprinting across the entire herd, or you could gain power-ups by popping your head into a saloon. Konami did an admirable job porting the game to the SNES, preserving a majority of the arcade's fun in the process. While it only supported two players versus the arcade's four, it remains one of the most fun shooters on the platform. – Sam Kennedy

Super Adventure Island

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: Hudson Soft.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Pudgy hero Master Higgins returns in this 16-bit upgrade of the popular *Adventure Island* series for the NES. Continuing Hudson Soft's second most beloved franchise (after *Bomberman*), *Super Adventure Island* has similar side-scrolling gameplay, but richer, more cartoon-like graphics and a better, more varied soundtrack (there is a different tune for each of the game's twenty stages). Unfortunately, the rideable dinosaurs from *Adventure Island II* are gone, but at least you can still ride a skateboard in certain levels. This makes you go faster and gives you an extra hit point, but it is a perilous mode of transportation, because you can't stop while you are riding the board. You can also swim at times.

To maintain his energy Higgins—who is on a quest to rescue Jeanie Jungle from the evil Dark Cloak—must eat fruit and drink milk. New to the series is the ability to do super jumps. Higgins journeys through such typical (though varied) areas as deserts, jungles, mines, snow, and a volcano using axes and boomerangs to fend off such enemies as walruses, electric eels, flying fish, flying dogs, dashing penguins, and balloon-riding lizards. Both weapon types can be powered up by grabbing icons of said weapons. There are also boss battles (against fireball-throwing Bamboozal and laser sword-wielding King Reptilian, among others), along with hidden bonus stages where you bounce from spring to spring collecting bonus items. Completing the stages—which are linear and short—in speedy fashion will award you with more points. Higgins moves slowly, but the game is an enjoyable adventure nonetheless.

Fun Fact: The music in *Super Adventure Island* was composed by Yuzo Koshiro of *ActRaiser* and *Streets of Rage* fame.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Adventure Island* is a bit lacking in content compared to its predecessors. There's not nearly as much variety in the items, and the game is over before you know it . . . However, it's still very fun, and perfect for when you feel like going through a game that's not too long but still challenging . . . fantastic, extremely catchy hip hop-esque tunes . . . The locales are all pretty attractive . . . there's actually, surprisingly, not a single environment that appears in more than one stage." – Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com).

Notable Quotable:

"The game is a blatant rip-off of *Wonder Boy*, but that's not necessarily a bad thing. The gameplay is a smart mix of platform action and combat related hijinks. Graphically, some of the screens are wonderful—funny sprites, slick animation, and brilliant characters. The graphics improve as you get further and further into the game, and the end-of-level bosses are a hoot. The music deserves a special mention. It is, without doubt, the best music so far on the SNES. The brilliant tunes even beat the awesome *ActRaiser*, and that's saying something. The gameplay is simple and at times frustrating. The sprite collision, while accurate, is unfair and leaves no room for error. Pixel perfect jumping ahoy! A good laugh, though, and a worthy purchase." – *Computer and Video Games* (March 1992)

Insider Insight:

Super Adventure Island was my introduction to the *Adventure Island* series. I did not know what I was getting into at the time my parents bought me the game, but when I started playing, I was immediately drawn to the fact that I could attack enemies with axes and boomerangs—all while riding a skateboard! That was something I never saw coming. For some reason, I always thought there was a timer on each stage. It was only after several years had passed that I understood that the meter in the top left corner was actually a health bar that slowly drains over time. That finally explained to me why Master Higgins needed to keep collecting fruit.

Some of the more frustrating moments with the game came when I would avoid contact with one enemy, only to be in position to get hit by the next one. Having to get through a level without taking a hit was also quite challenging. I could not get very far the first few times I played, but as I kept on playing I got better and better. Defeating the bosses with upgraded boomerangs became a cinch. I also enjoyed listening to the sweet sounds of hip-hop and calypso while journeying to save Miss Jungle. – Houston Bogus III

Super Adventure Island II

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: Hudson Soft.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer/Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

In *Super Adventure Island II*, Master Higgins must search a tropical island for his wife Tina, who has been taken by the king of Waku Waku. Unlike the previous game, this one has RPG and puzzle elements encouraging exploration. There are also more weapons. In addition to axes and boomerangs, Higgins can acquire daggers, fireballs, and seven types of swords: silver, fire, ice, thunder, crystal, power, and light. Plus he can don different types of armor and shields, and he can use the following magic: feather, which takes Higgins to the beginning stages of the island he is on; recovery, which restores his health by half a heart; tie, which temporarily stops enemies; wing, which transports him to any island on the world map; blizzard, which attacks enemies with a snowstorm; power boost, which makes him temporarily invincible; blaze, which attacks enemies with a firestorm; and cure, which fully restores his health.

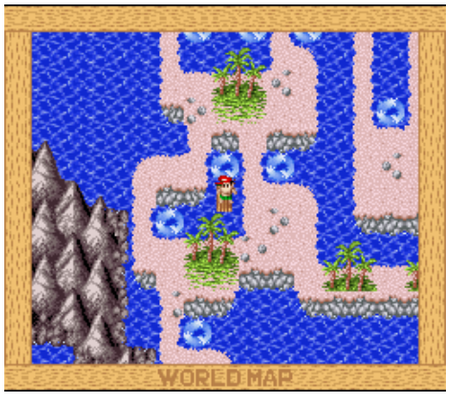
To open or destroy certain gates Higgins must find special items, such as an ice bell used to summon an ice giant and a sun ring for causing a volcano to erupt. As if that were not enough, Higgins can use a shovel to dig for treasure boxes containing armor, shields, weapons, health, magic boosts, and coins, the last of which can be spent in the casino shop, where you play slots and roulette, and gamble on monster races. Higgins also rides on moving platforms, bounces on springs, floats in bubbles, navigates an overhead map via a raft, and climbs ropes, chains, and vines.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Adventure Island II* is a good cart that best suits fans of games such as *Wonder Boy* or even *Zelda II: The Adventure of Link*. If you enjoy roaming around looking for items, but still crave action, this might be just what you're looking for." – *Game Players* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"It's a radical gameplay change, but perhaps for the best—*Super Adventure Island II* is arguably the best game in the entire series and well worth a play even if you're not a fan of the previous games. It strikes a perfect balance between being easy for newcomers and challenging for veterans, ensuring that no matter how good you are you'll have a good time." – Marcel van Duyn (www.nintendolife.com).



Insider Insight:
I have loved the Adventure Island series for the NES since I was a child. I played the original at my friend Amy's house and I thoroughly enjoyed it. When I got a little older and the SNES came out, I remember how badly I wanted *Super Adventure Island*. My uncle bought it for me, and I will forever be grateful to him for that. At the time it was one of only two games in my Super Nintendo collection, and it will always have a special place in my heart.

Fast forward to 2013. At this point in my life, I had started retro collecting for the same nostalgic reason most people do: to relive my childhood. At first I only collected SNES games. One day, while searching the internet for titles I wanted to purchase, I stumbled across a surprise: *Super Adventure Island II*! I had absolutely no idea this game even existed! I knew that the original had sequels, but I never realized that there was a sequel to the SNES game.

When I checked Facebook later that week, I saw that the game had come into my local retro video game store as a trade-in. I rushed over to get my hands on it and added it to the small collection I had started. At this moment, I discovered a new reason to collect old video games: the joy of finding gems that I had never played before or even heard of. In the years since this epic find I have amassed an awesome collection of games for a variety of consoles. I will always remember that *Super Adventure Island II* was the first game to make me realize just how big the world of video games truly is. And I had just scratched the surface! – Raymond Fix

Super Alfred Chicken

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Twilight.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Super Alfred Chicken is a longer, better-looking game than its progenitor, *Alfred Chicken* for the NES, and it features new levels. However, it plays in a similar fashion. Players guide the titular bird through twenty-one toy land stages of plucky mayhem using a pecking maneuver, a dive-bombing pecking technique, and projectiles (when you get them) to battle such enemies as chickens, snails, windup mice, Alice Ladybird Ladybug, Mino the Whale, and Jack-in-a-Bomb, among many others. The objective in each level is to find and release the Mr. Pekles balloon, taking him to a space lab where he is awarded points and extras according to the bonuses he has collected. Small balloons act as save points.

For an assist, Alfred can grab such items as egg cups (for extra lives), presents (for temporary invincibility), soda pop cans (to use as platforms), clocks (for extra time), and cans o' worms (a worm spins around him, destroying monsters and breaking through ice blocks). There are hidden warps, blocks to peck on/off to cause things to happen on screen (such as to keep the ceiling from crushing you), moving platforms to ride, areas to swim through, diamonds to collect (100 for an extra life), buttons to push for accessing other areas of the level, doors leading to secret rooms, camouflaged passageways to find, blocks to peck through, bonus mini-games (such as the classic shell game), and bouncy springs enabling Alfred to jump high since he can't fly (though he can flap his wings and float a bit).

Fun Fact: To promote the Amiga version of *Alfred Chicken*, Product Manager Karl Fitzhugh ran as the "Alfred Chicken Party" candidate in the 1993 by-election in the Christchurch, Dorset constituency. He finished second-to-last with eighteen votes—two votes ahead of the Rainbow Party candidate.

Notable Quotable:

"A cute game that the younger ones will enjoy more. *Alfred* is a slow-moving game requiring more strategy than being able to run, jump, and grab items. It takes a while to get in the swing of it." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Nothing stunningly original or frighteningly intriguing, but it all succeeds due to some perfectly fine-tuned gameplay. Challenge and intricacy increase steadily throughout . . . the restart points are perfectly spaced and placed . . . It's still just a platform game, slightly repetitive, not much of a graphical treat, and unlikely to be looked at again once completed. But the execution can't be faulted and, bluntly, I liked it." – *Super Play* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a slowly paced game that is predicated mostly on jumping and dodging . . . the gameplay here is very standard, regular, ordinary platforming stuff . . . This game has one-hit deaths, so that kinda sucks . . . There's not much story here; the color palette is kinda flat. It looks much more like an Amiga game than a Super Nintendo game . . . The soundtrack gets annoying after a while . . . *Super Alfred Chicken* isn't bad, but it's definitely not that good, either." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

The Super Aquatic Games Starring the Aquabats

Publisher: Seika.
Developer: Millennium Interactive/Vectordean.
Game Type: Sports/Olympics, 1–4 players (alternating).
Year: 1993.

A follow-up to the platformer *Super James Pond* (called *James Pond II—Codename: RoboCod* on the Genesis), *The Super Aquatic Games Starring the Aquabats* offers eight Olympic-style events featuring cute animals: 100-Meter Splash (button-mash to race across a wide body of water); Relay Race (run using different characters); Shell Shooting (jump on shell creatures to catch them and then throw them at balloons); The Bouncy Castle (jump and do tricks on a sponge trampoline); Leap Frog (run hurdles as a frog); Tour de Grass (ride a unicycle as a circus shark); Feeding Time (use sweets to divert fish from fishermen—plays a little like the arcade classic *Tapper*); and Kipper Watching (run, jump, and deflect beach balls away from other seals).

As with Konami's *Track & Field* (arcade, 1983), which this game parodies, much of the gameplay consists of fast button mashing and timed button presses. Cute, cartoonish graphics and nice animation complement this odd assortment of mostly playable games. Similar to *The Aquatic Games Starring James Pond and the Aquabats* for the Genesis, but the Genesis cartridge replaces the Relay Race with a competition called Hop, Skip and Jump. Followed by *James Pond 3: Operation Starfish* (Genesis).

Fun Fact: In 2011, *James Pond and the Deathly Shallows* was released for iOS. It was the fifth game in the series and the first in the franchise in eighteen years. The title is a cheeky jab at *Harry Potter and The Deathly Hallows*.

Notable Quotable:
"A terrible attempt at reviving a long-dead genre." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The cartoony graphics and funny sounds place this game squarely in the beginner's pool. The controls, which require simultaneous multiple button-pressing, could drown some dog paddlers, but it's worth the effort." – *GamePro* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The gameplay is shallower than the pool Mr. Pond runs across and quickly becomes tiresome for anyone accustomed to more sophisticated games. Sadly, though, for younger players it is seemingly impossible to press the button at a fast enough speed to get a qualifying time, even in easy Tadpole mode . . . Fortunately, there is a practice mode that allows you to select from all of the events, though for many the same problem exists; they're too complex for the young, too monotonous and frustrating for the old . . . Everything looks clean, crisp, and more colorful than a coral reef. It echoes the wit seen in *RoboCod* with stages littered with visual jokes, fish puns, and clever little details. Sadly, though, there is a lot of repetition." – Boxed Pixels (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

Super Baseball 2020

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: Pallas.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Based on SNK's 1991 arcade game, *Super Baseball 2020* is a futuristic take on America's pastime, with gamers selecting from twelve teams comprised of men, women, and robots. Teams include American Dreams, Tokyo Samurais, Naples Seagulls, Korea Dragoon, Taiwan Megapowers, Battle Angels, Battle Heroes, Ninja Black Sox, Metal Slashers, Aussie Battlers, Tropical Girls, and Mechanical Brains. Each team is rated according to throwing, hitting, fielding, and chance, which is overall competitive strength—a trait that helps when runners are on base.

In some respects, the game plays like a lot of other video baseball titles (nine innings per game, three strikes for an out, behind-the-batter view), but your players can do two types of rocket pack-assisted ultimate super plays: jumping catches and power dive catches. You earn prize money by performing various plays, such as doubles, triples, home runs, and diving catches. You can use the money to power up your team (including the purchase of robots), but be warned that certain plays (like striking out) can subtract money from your stash.

Cyber Egg Stadium, which is where games are played, is also unconventional. It has a smaller foul zone, a larger fair zone, a home run zone (the middle section of the outfield bleachers), a jumping zone (where you can jump super high to prevent a home run), and stop zones (where the ball stops immediately). When a robot player runs out of fuel or is damaged by a hard-hit ground ball it will be taken off the field and replaced by a low-performing spare robot. When possible, you should use a reserve player or purchase a special robot to take the downed robot's place.

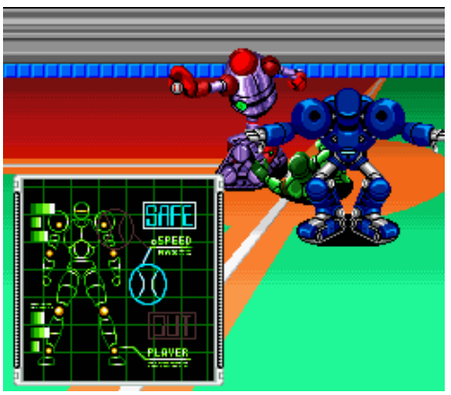
Other notable features include bunts, check swings, lead-offs, steals, close-ups, celebratory pitchers, home run animations, armor on the players, and increased batting power for both teams upon entering the seventh inning. After you release a pitch, you can move the ball as it heads toward the plate. When batting, you can move around in the batter's box. *Super Baseball 2020* was also released for the Neo Geo, Neo Geo CD, and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Does for baseball what *Cyberball* did for football . . . most of the robots look the same and feature very few unique animations . . . offers plenty of twists on the traditional baseball theme. It's a fun game, but the average graphics and apathetic use of the SNES sound chip keep this cart from being a standout" – *VideoGames* (September 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Baseball 2020* is a pretty creative little spin on baseball . . . The revamped field adds some new possibilities, the cash and upgrade system allows for some different strategic moves, and, let's face it, robots playing sports is always a pretty strong selling point. It's not the most immersive game, as an arcade port, but anyone can jump right into it and have fun, which is always a positive, and for a game so old that we've almost reached the year it describes, it all looks and sounds fine. – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)



Insider Insight:
During the early 1990s, a friend of mine named Charlie and I had just graduated from high school. Since we worked for the same company we decided to be roommates, as it would be cheaper than each of us living on our own. As part of the arrangement we brought our gaming systems and computers, turning the living room into a console room/LAN party area.

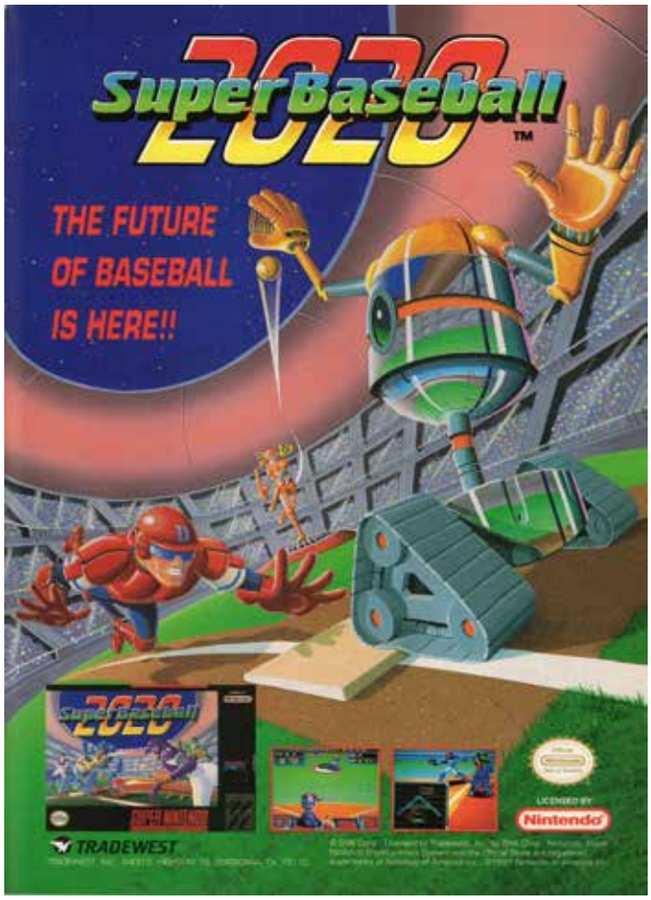
The first day we moved in, we joked that we should play a game every day until we leave. We rummaged through the box of Super Nintendo games—one of the first boxes we opened—and decided that we should play *Super Baseball 2020*, since neither of us had played it much. We set up the Super Nintendo, got everything wired, and plugged in the cartridge. It worked! Little did we know just how memorable this game would become.

For the first match I picked Korea Dragoon—the team I would end up playing the entire time—and Charlie picked the Battle Angels. I picked a pitcher, Ha Ho Ra, and we got started. Ha Ho Ra goes on a tear, striking out most of the Battle Angels' lineup, and I win by a shutout. We laughed about it and turned in for the night.

The next day I took Korea Dragoon while Charlie selected another team. Ha Ho Ra goes on a tear and I win in a shutout. This scenario happened the next day, the next, and the next. This went on for six months straight. Eventually Charlie figured out my game and scored a run. The problem was I already had a dozen runs. However, Ha Ho Ra getting scored on dented the armor of my ego, so I picked a new pitcher and it all happened again. The Dragoons won victory after victory!

We ended up playing the game, as we said we would, every day from the day we moved in until the day we left, which was just under a year. My record was 350-something and 0. To this day, Charlie and I will get together now and then, hang out, and start playing games. If there is a game he starts really beating me at and the trash talk comes out (such as *WWF Royal Rumble*, where he routinely dominated), I always go to the same defense: Korea Dragoon, *Super Baseball 2020*—undefeated champ! We always laugh at this.

To Charlie's credit, he stuck with every game of *Super Baseball 2020* to the bitter end. While he would get a little discouraged now and then, he never quit playing or got upset. The best part was that the Super Nintendo became a key part of our friendship that has lasted over thirty years. That is much more valuable than my undefeated streak.
– Cliff Friedel



Super Baseball Simulator 1.000

Publisher: Culture Brain.
Developer: Culture Brain.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–6 players (2-player simultaneous).
Year: 1991.

While it hardly takes full advantage of the more powerful Super NES, *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000* is at least a minor audio/visual upgrade over its progenitor, *Baseball Simulator 1.000* for the NES. Gameplay is largely the same, giving players the ability to play seasons and exhibition games, save stats, select from six different stadiums (Brown, Dome, CB, Grass, Town, and Harbor), and edit teams according to team name, uniform color, player names, and player data.

The super-fun Ultra Play returns, providing thirty-nine different special maneuvers (some of which are different from the NES game). There are fifteen Ultra Batting techniques, including hyper hit (double batting power), invisiball (the ball disappears when hit), missile hit (the fielder who catches the ball is blown back to the fence), spinner hit (the entire field revolves), and leaf hit (the ball turns into a leaf). There are four Ultra Fielding plays, including super slide, rocket jump, super catch, and hyper throw; and twenty Ultra Balls (pitches), including jumper, zig zag, spiral, lotta (multiple balls, but only one is real), and photon (speeds of up to 200 mph). Each team has a limited number of Ultra Points for executing Ultra Plays.

You can turn errors on an off and select from three difficulty levels: standard, advance, and expert. You can also choose season length (5, 30, 60, or 165 games) and number of innings per game (1, 3, 5, or 9). Other features include steals, pinch hitters, shifting fielders, and more. After each game, TV news coverage will display such stats as the score, the teams' win-loss records, a pitcher's saves, and home runs hit. If you want to send signals but not actually play the game you can select Manager Mode and watch the action as it unfolds.

Fun Fact: Back in the day, the original *Baseball Simulator 1.000* for the Nintendo Entertainment System was chosen "Best sports game of the year for the NES" by *Game Players* magazine.

Notable Quotable:
"As a regular baseball game, you could say that *Super Baseball Simulator* is above average, but the addition of the Ultra League makes this an extremely fun game to play." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Despite some extremely suspect controls, there is an undeniable fun factor here that is hard to resist. If the Justice League were to say 'Screw humanity. Let's play Baseball,' the games would look a lot like *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000*." – *Game Informer Magazine* (November 2004)

Insider Insight:
The original *Baseball Simulator 1.000* on NES may be my favorite baseball game of all time. Though most seem to dismiss it today, I loved its mix of superheroic baseball abilities and—if you wanted it—one of the most solid sims of America's pastime of its day. Well, a solid sim that includes a stadium in outer space, anyway. I used the edit feature in the game to create the most accurate lineup of teams in 1991, straight outta the daily box scores even. (Whaddup, LA shortstop José Offerman?)

So I was incredibly excited for the sequel when I finally had the chance to play it—but the only thing "super" about *Super Baseball Simulator 1.000* was my disappointment. Instead of offering more of everything in a package that looked a lot better, it presented me with seemingly less than I had remembered from the NES version . . . and it only looked a little bit better.

Actually, looking at the manual two decades later . . . no . . . it didn't offer anything less—my mind just remembers it that way. (Isn't that weird how that happens sometimes? I blame the Mandela Effect . . .) The Ultra pitches and Ultra hits were on par with the original. It basically played the same and has comparable other features. It just . . . was not as magical. Does that make sense?

One huge thing that massive hadron colider in Switzerland has not changed through the years, though—where is the trademark Space stadium?! You know, the stadium that on its own in the NES version said, "Look at me! I singlehandedly represent the fun nature of this baseball franchise!"? Totally gone in favor of the new, soulless CB Stadium—though it is excellently named, if this Chris Baker does say so himself. Oh, I guess CB means "Culture Brain." Yeah . . . definitely soulless. Maybe this game actually is best left to hazy memories. – Chris Baker

Super Bases Loaded, Ryne Sandberg Plays

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Tose.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1991.

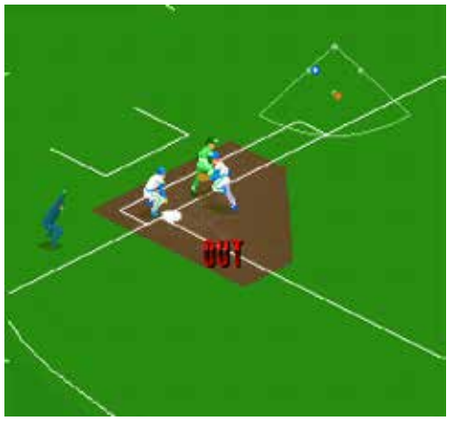
Like *Bases Loaded 3* for the NES, *Super Bases Loaded* for the SNES is endorsed by legendary Chicago Cub Ryne Sandberg, and it features that title's substantial challenge to play the perfect game and get a perfect rating, which requires beating a level five team with a 100 rating. In the standard one-player option, you select one of thirteen fictional teams (such as the Boston Buzzards or the Los Angeles Lizards) and play the other twelve teams back to back. You begin the game with an overall rating of 100. After the game is over, you will get points subtracted from your rating based on mistakes you made, including striking out, getting caught stealing, getting picked off a base, and throwing to an unmanned base. You can add to your rating by making great plays.

Hitting and pitching are viewed from behind the pitcher, á la *Bases Loaded 3* and *Bases Loaded 4*. As the pitcher, you can manipulate the d-pad to adjust where the ball is thrown, and as the batter you must match the ball's position and swing at the right time to get a hit. When the ball is hit into play a scrolling top-down view follows the action, and a radar pops up that shows the location of fielders in relation to the ball. In two-player mode, you go at it mano a mano against another gamer. There is also an option to edit players, and there is a Watch mode that lets you kick back and watch the computer play against itself. Known as *Super Professional Baseball* in Japan.

Fun Fact: "When he retired after the 1997 season, Ryne Sandberg held the all-time record of 123 consecutive errorless games by a second baseman. He also had hit more home runs than any second baseman in the history of the majors.

Notable Quotable:
"The characters are realistically drawn, as opposed to cartoon graphics. The animation is similarly lifelike, and presents a very polished product . . . Playable, addictive and looks great." – *Raze* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:
"Disappoints in a lot of ways . . . graphics can only be described as adequate. The players look a bit 'chunky' and badly drawn, and the pathetic crowd graphics are laughable. Sure, Jaleco has used the machine's ability to rotate and shrink the pitch, but here it really is just a gimmick, unlike *F-Zero* where it's an integral part of the game. Sound, too, fails to impress. There are some digitized calls and all the crowd roars you'd expect . . . Aesthetically, then, [it] strikes out. But what's this, riding over the brow of the hill like the cavalry to save the day? Why, it's the enjoyable gameplay . . . The cyclic nature of the pitch-strike-run action couldn't be called pulse racing, but it's still enjoyable—almost relaxing, in fact." – *ACE (Advanced Computer Entertainment)* (August 1991)



Insider Insight:
The Atlanta Amoebas. Oh, how I wish real sports teams were this weird. I have never been much of a sports guy in real life, but I love old sports games. As technology moved forward they became more sportsy than gamey, but during the 16-bit era sports games hit that perfect balance, and *Super Bases Loaded* was probably the one I put the most time into.

My sister could always mop the floor with me in most sports games, starting with *Football* for Atari 2600 and carrying on through *Blades of Steel*, *Tecmo Bowl*, and beyond, but I could usually hold my own when it came to baseball games. If you caught me on the right day, it would not matter if you were the Texas Tornados, the Washington Weasels, or whatever other genius alliterative team name Jaleco thought up back then; me and my Atlanta Amoebas were unstoppable.
– Kris Randazzo

Super Bases Loaded 2

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Tose.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Released in Japan as *Super 3D Baseball*, *Super Bases Loaded 2* is quite a bit different from previous games in the series, thanks in part to a DSP chip that allows for (pseudo) 3D graphics. After the ball is hit into play, the camera tracks the baseball "with an amazing 3D camera perspective." The game features three modes of play: Exhibition, Regular Season, and All Star. For Season play you can adjust the length from 10 to 162 games, and player stats are saved after each game via battery backup.

There are fourteen teams from which to choose, each denoted by a real city name, but not authentic team mascots or logos, since there is no MLB licensing. You can design and save up to four squads in Exhibition and Regular Season mode via a special Custom Team option. You can play the game in one of three stadiums. The stadiums are generic, but each has a different look and size. For example, one has the tallest wall, while another has the shortest distance from home plate to center field.

Players are fictional, but they vary in terms of such abilities as hitting, stealing, and throwing power. Other features include bunting, check swings, diving stops, double plays, fatigued players, sacrifice flies, and batters that charge the mound when they get hit by a pitch. To adjust the difficulty level you can turn errors and automatic fielding on or off. The title screen refers to the game as "Super Bases Loaded II."

Notable Quotable:
"*Super Bases Loaded 2* is the only game in the series not originally intended to be part of the series. Tose developed *Super Professional Baseball 2* (the actual sequel to *Super Bases Loaded*) in August of 1992. They then developed a standalone baseball game, *Super 3D Baseball*, in October of 1993. Jaleco decided to publish *Super 3D Baseball* here in the States as *Super Bases Loaded 2*. Interesting that they skipped over *Super Professional Baseball 2*. This explains the drastic shift in style and look for *Super Bases Loaded 2* . . . Although the players aren't real nor [are] the teams, it's still fun to play." – RVGFanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"If you're having trouble getting the bat around on fastballs, move your batter back in the batter's box to gain an extra split second. The computer's runners are aggressive—your outfielders can often catch them

trying to take an extra base on hits to the gap. Watch the computer pitcher's feet—if he moves along the rubber, adjust your batter's position accordingly . . . the players move with some choppiness and slowdown, and it can be hard to gauge where a fly ball will land, but these troubles don't impede gameplay . . . The biggest flaw in the game is the lack of real-life teams and players . . . it's hard to get emotionally attached . . . Strong graphics . . . The sounds are serviceable . . . the crack of the bat, the ball thudding against the wall, the umpire's calls—are clear and effective . . . a nice, uncomplicated game." – *GamePro* (April 1994)

Super Bases Loaded 3: License to Steal

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Tose.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

Super Bases Loaded 3: License to Steal is the seventh title in the *Bases Loaded* series. Like all the previous games, this one lacks a Major League Baseball license. However, it is the first game in the franchise backed by the Major League Baseball Players Association, meaning 700 authentic Major Leaguers are featured, including such stars as Barry Bonds, Will Clark, Tony Gwynn, Kirby Puckett, Ivan Rodriguez, Tim Raines, and Frank Thomas. STATS Inc.—a recognized statistics company—provides player stats and team ratings.

You can play an Exhibition game or enter a full 162-game Season based on the 1994 calendar. In Season mode errors and wind are always turned on, so players will occasionally make mistakes, and the wind can influence the trajectory of fly balls. You can opt to play an MVP Game—an all-star game pitting American League players against National League players—or select Championship mode, in which two gamers select teams and play a 3-, 7-, 11-, or 15-game series.

Other options and features include lead-offs, steals, bunts, hit-and-run plays, pinch hits, substitutions, and automatic or manual control. You can alter your team's lineup and throw ten types of pitches. You view the action from behind the pitcher. When the ball is hit into play an elevated camera follows the action. Battery backup saves season and tournament progress. Followed by *Bases Loaded '96: Double Header* (PlayStation, Saturn), the eighth and final game in the series.

Notable Quotable:

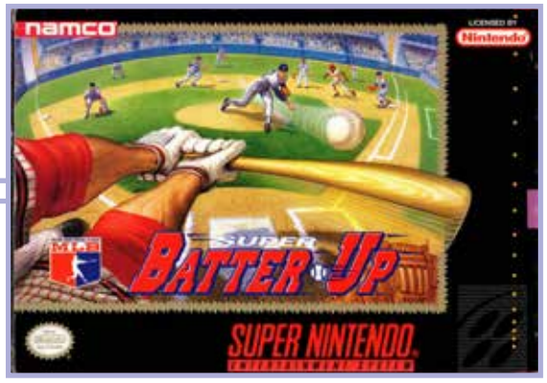
"The graphics are above average but nothing to write home about, and even the ballpark sounds grow a bit repetitive after a while. But if you can get past the fielding errors, *Super Bases Loaded 3* offers a small taste of the type of gameplay that made *Ken Griffey Jr. Presents Major League Baseball* so much fun." – *Game Players* (May 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"A definite must for a good baseball game is the ability to customize your options. *SBL 3* lets you automate almost every aspect of the game. Try auto-fielding and running while letting the computer hit, or vice versa—you have plenty of combos to experiment with. Mix up your pitches to fool tough hitters . . . adjust your swing and stance for maximum power . . . The controls are excellent . . . The music is annoying and the sound effects are few, but the sprites and the action are clear, colorful, and realistically presented with a great view from the mound. What other baseball game shows you what really happens when a homer leaves the stadium and lands in the parking lot?" – *GamePro* (March 1995)

Super Batter Up

Publisher: Namco Hometek.
Developer: Namco Ltd.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



A run-of-the-mill baseball game, *Super Batter Up* has an elevated, behind-the-batter perspective with third- and first-base windows. The action switches to an overhead view when the ball is hit into play. All twenty-six Major League teams are featured, but they are only designated by city—not mascot or logo, since there is no MLB licensing. MLBPA licensing allows all the real players (with stats to match) from the 1991 rosters, including such stars as Cal Ripken, Dave Winfield, Kirby Puckett, Ryne Sandberg, Roger Clemens, and Nolan Ryan. Prior to games "The Star-Spangled Banner" plays, and you will hear "Oh Canada" for matches played in Toronto. There is also organ music during games.

Pitchers can throw fastballs, change-ups, and curve balls, along with throwing lead-off runners out. Fielders can jump and dive, and you can use the shadow under the ball to estimate where it will land. Other features and options include pinch hitters; substitutions; checked swings; triple and double plays; errors turned on or off; called game on or off (if on, a game will end if one team scores 2, 4, 6, 8, or 10 more runs than the other team); number of innings (1, 3, 5, 7, or 9); League play (a full season); a post-game show; homerun celebrations (including Pac-Man flying through the sky on a missile, with music to match); and three stadiums: Wrigley Field, Busch Stadium II, and Skydome. Released in Japan as *Super Famista*. Similar to *R.B.I. Baseball 3* (Genesis).

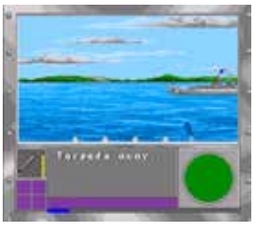
Notable Quotable:
"This is basically an average baseball game with short, fast-moving players, good controls, and great graphics. The news article to read after the game is a cool idea." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1994, Adventure Press)

Notable Quotable:
"As baseball simulations go it's a bit on the average side. Although the graphics are colorful and well defined, the action is a little awkward to control and, as I'm totally bewildered by baseball, I had to have a lie down before playing the next game." – *N-Force* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"*Super Batter Up* feels like any other baseball game, just set to easy. The A.I. seems to be rather dumb and unskilled, the pitching and hitting are very generous, and it uses the same camera angles that the other games use . . . I wish Namco had done anything to make *Super Batter Up* stand out. I had more fun with this game than most other baseball games. The lack of depth and simplicity that I enjoy are probably what will make people who know and care about baseball not enjoy this game, though." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Super Battleship: The Classic Naval Combat Game

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Synergistic Software.
Game Type: Board Game, 1 player.
Year: 1993.



Super Battleship: The Classic Naval Combat Game features two modes of play: Classic Battleship, which is similar to Milton Bradley's famous board game; and Super Battleship, which expands the action with maneuverability around various waterways, multiple viewpoints, radar and sonar, ship damage and repairs, more weaponry (main guns, torpedoes, depth charges, and missiles), and mission-based gameplay—escort a merchant vessel to a safe harbor, rescue a soldier, raid an airfield, and hunt down and destroy enemy supply ships, among twelve other missions.

There are three categories of vessels: neutral, enemy (submarine, shore batteries, and mines), and friendly (patrol boat, destroyer, escort, battleship, light cruiser, heavy cruiser, and battle cruiser). Surprisingly—not to mention disappointingly—the slowly paced, turn-based, real-time strategy gameplay lacks a two-player mode—a confounding absence in a game like this. Missions are the same as the Genesis version, but the SNES game has better graphics, while the Genesis rendition runs at a faster pace. "Taps" plays when ships sink in the SNES cart, a feature lacking in the Genesis game.

Fun Fact: Played as a pencil-and-paper game dating back to World War I, *Battleship* did not become an official board game until Milton Bradley produced it in 1967. In 2012, Universal Pictures released *Battleship* (directed by Peter Berg), a movie loosely based on the board game.

Notable Quotable:

"Crisp, colorful graphics, detailed sound effects, and responsive controls in Super mode compensate for music that'll give you that sinking feeling. The Classic mode gets redundant after a while, requiring more luck than strategy. The choice of modes, though, keeps this cart afloat." – *GamePro* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Battleship* should probably be judged on its execution, in terms of turn-based strategy. Which it handles well. You'll have a top-down view of the action while navigating the boats or deciding what to blow up. It's easy enough to tell which boats are which; you're blue and enemies are red. Striking a delicate balance between action and strategy, you'll flip to an on-deck perspective, viewing the enemy from behind the ship's guns. Specific areas of the opponent can be aimed at, and depending on how close you got before firing the initial first shot, it's pretty easy to tell what's been damaged on the ship. What it basically comes down to is knocking out their primary guns and then going for whatever is keeping the boat afloat. Likewise, they have the same objective . . . It's a shame the movement is so sluggish and that it takes so long to make any kind of change in direction with your ships." – Calvin Kemph (www.thunderboltgames.com)

Super Battletank: War in the Gulf, Garry Kitchen's

Publisher: Absolute Entertainment.
Developer: Imagineering Inc.
Game Type: First-Person Tank Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Designed by Garry Kitchen and Alex DeMeo, *Super Battletank: War in the Gulf* is the follow-up to *Battletank* for the NES, which was similar to Atari's *Battlezone*. You guide an armored M1A1 battletank that can accelerate, decelerate, shoot, and rotate left and right as you work your way through ten missions, battling such enemies as SCUD launchers, Mi-24 HIND helicopters, and T-62 tanks while destroying bunkers, ammo dumps, chemical weapons facilities, oil refineries, and other targets. The tank is equipped with 7.62 mm machine guns, smoke grenades, and 120 mm armor-piercing shells controlled by a laser range finder.

The view of the action is from inside the tank. The top half of the playfield shows a trio of view screens while the lower half displays gun angle, range of enemy, fuel gauge, enemy targets remaining, speedometer, weapons status indicator, shots remaining, damage indicator, mapping system (you will consult a real-time map to travel to various target locations), and message center, which relays such crucial information as equipment status and communications from the Allied Forces commander.

During missions you should be careful to avoid mines. Fuel and armaments must occasionally be replenished, and the tank must go in for repairs from time to time. Based on the real-life Operation Desert Storm (pitting the US vs. Iraq), this game was also released for the Genesis. The Game Box and Game Gear versions are simply called *Super Battletank*, as are the Japanese and European versions of the SNES game. Remade for the Game Boy Advance as *Operation: Armored Liberty*.

Fun Fact: Years before founding Absolute Entertainment, Garry Kitchen worked on such Atari 2600 games as *Donkey Kong*, *Space Jockey*, *Keystone Kapers*, and *Pressure Cooker*. He also had his hand in creating such titles as *Home Alone* for the SNES and *The Simpsons: Bart vs. the Space Mutants* for the NES.

Notable Quotable:
"A great-looking game that plays well also." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"All in all it's not a good game and in bad taste considering the tragic eventualities of the Gulf War." – *N-Force* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics are nothing short of stunning, smoothly animated, and highly detailed. The sound is pretty good, too, although the constant engine noise does get a bit annoying and a tune wouldn't have gone amiss. Sadly, this is just about all *Super Battletank* has going for it . . . only a tiny amount of the play area is visible at one time through the minute windscreen of the tank. Also, the action is very 'samey.' Drive over to an enemy. He then zooms towards you, guns a-blazing and then turns and drives away. This action is repeated, regardless of whether your foe is a tank or helicopter. There is never more than one target attacking at one time, thus no tactics are required at all." – The Mean Machines Archive (www.meanmachinesmag.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"The most challenging part was achieving the photorealistic look. Photorealism is easier on a bit-map graphic display system. However, the NES and SNES were character-based graphics systems, meaning that the complexity of the image on the screen is limited . . . We digitized actual footage whenever possible, which was tricky because in that timeframe [1990] computers weren't very good at handling large files and digitizing tools were limited at best . . . I do remember how hard I worked on creating the effect of the big gun firing. I wanted it to knock you out of your chair. I spent weeks referencing slow-motion footage of the actual M1A1 Abrams tank firing a shell, paying close attention to the initial flash and the way the smoke dissipated. I spent a lot of time with the artist tweaking that effect . . . Developing for the Super NES was great fun . . . One of my favorite consoles, for sure." – *Super Battletank* programmer Garry Kitchen (2018, *The Minds Behind the Games: Interviews With Cult and Classic Video Game Developers*)

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Super Battletank 2

Publisher: Absolute Entertainment.
Developer: Absolute Entertainment.
Game Type: First-Person Tank Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The sequel to *Super Battletank: War in the Gulf*, *Super Battletank 2* is an SNES exclusive that puts you in the middle of an unnamed conflict in the Middle East, controlling an M1A2 Battletank through sixteen missions, including day and nighttime scenarios. Aided by radar, you must scout out groups of enemy tanks using your primary gun turret to destroy such foes as jeeps, infantrymen, SCUD missiles, and armored personnel carriers. You can also launch patriot missiles, call in supply drops to restock ammo and armor, and launch F-15 air strikes to bomb the battleground from the skies.

For temporary invincibility to enemy radar you can put up a smokescreen. Enemy tanks and helicopters weave in and out of your viewscreen as you go, and an onboard camera displays full motion video of enemy termination. Your primary view of the action is from inside your tank, but sometimes you will go topside to battle airborne threats like helicopters and planes with your Phalanx machine gun. From time to time intelligence reports on the com-link will advise you of SCUD missile attacks on allied supply depots.

Notable Quotable:

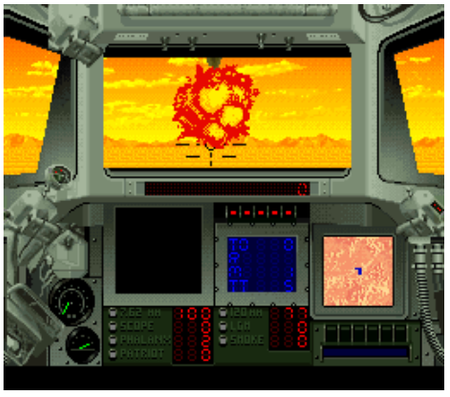
"Who says sequels aren't better than the original? This has more of everything than the original. Still, the action gets repetitive after the first 8-to-10 missions." – *Game Players* (January 1994).

Notable Quotable:

"This tank-battle simulation is even more realistic and challenging than the original. Fast-paced, arcade-style shoot-em-up action ensures this cart won't appeal just to war buffs." – *GamePro* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"We were pleased with the original *Super Battletank*, but with only 4 Mega, it had its limitations. We wanted to see what we could do with 16 Meg in this sequel. It allowed us to build in a lot of depth of gameplay, and maximize the use of digitized graphics and full-motion video. Now more than one enemy can appear on screen at one time, for fierce battle play . . . We tried to spread a lot of the features throughout the 16 missions, so each one has its own unique flavor." – Absolute Entertainment co-founder Garry Kitchen (March 1994, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*)



Super Black Bass

Publisher: HOT-B USA.
Developer: HOT-B Co.
Game Type: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

If you do not have the time or inclination to go to the lake but you feel like catching a few fish, you may want to try *Super Black Bass*, which lets you compete for the prestigious title of Super Bass Champion. There are five different types of fish that you can catch: blue gill, rainbow trout, catfish, northern pike, and of course, black bass.

The game plays by the rules of professional tournament fishing. Hours are from 7:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., and you can't be late to the weigh-in or you will be penalized. There is a five bass maximum allowed in the livewell, and you must avoid No Fishing areas, such as the spawning pool and the dock. Tournaments include Local Amateur Tournament, Amateur Bass Championship, Pro Bass Circuit, and Super Bass Championship. Your goal in each tournament is to have the highest accumulative bass weight.

To catch a fish you must choose lure type and color, set the hook, cast your line (overhand or flip), and wait for a nibble. Then you must reel in the line, which consists of such things as reeling quickly, swinging the rod strongly, pulling the rod up, thumbing the line, reeling in instantly, and/or cutting the line. When casting a line you view the game from a first-person perspective, peering over the shoulder of the on-screen angler. When piloting the boat (to find a good fishing spot), retrieving the lure, or fighting the fish, the viewpoint switches to overhead.

Your tackle box contains eight different lures: pencil bait, popper, swisher, frog, spinnerbait, crankbait, rubber jug, and plastic worm. There are two types of fishing points: surface and underwater. On-screen data provides such information as line length, lure depth, line tension, fish strength, angler strength, weather conditions, and water temperature. There is even a fish finder, which is an electronic device that uses sonar to detect fish.

Lakes to fish in include Skywater Lake, a small, shallow mountain lake; Clear Lake, which is large and man-made; Lake Murphy, an old shallow lake with murky waters; and Bluestone Lake, a wide field lake with docks and bridges. *Super Black Bass* is an upgrade over *The Black Bass* for the NES. It was followed by various sequels, including *Bassin's Black Bass* (*Super Black Bass 2* in Japan) and *Super Black Bass 3D* (Nintendo 3DS).

Notable Quotable:

"Controls are very well designed and so intuitive that I didn't even need to consult the instruction manual. The graphics are only fair, but they do make use of the SNES scaling effects. I really like the sound of water rushing up against the boat, but what's that constant bellowing? A beached whale? I could also do without that banjo music that plays as you putt around in your boat. *Super Black Bass* is one of those games that requires patience and time investment . . . More of a simulation than an arcade game . . . Unless you're a diehard fishing fanatic, it's a bit of a drag." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight: In the '90s, I operated a chain of video game stores in Kentucky. One store was named after Ralph Baer's initial name for the Magnavox Odyssey—Let's Play. In addition to selling games we also rented them, and if the customer liked the game they rented enough to buy it, they would get the rental price discounted from the purchase price.

One customer thought very highly of *Super Black Bass*. He rented it several times, and after a few such instances I proposed that he buy the game at the discounted price. He agreed, but the payment never arrived. Donnie, if you are reading this, you owe me $47.99 and $8,759 in late fees! – Michael Thomasson

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Super Bomberman

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: Produce.
Game Type: Maze, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

One of the best party games for any system, *Super Bomberman* maintains the basic gameplay of the popular, highly addictive *Bomberman* for the NES, but adds something crucial that is a trademark of all the sequels and spin-offs: multi-player action. The two-player mode is great, but things get really exciting and chaotic when three or four gamers go at it. This is achievable via a multi-tap adapter, which is available separately or included with the game via a special release packaged in an oversized box called the *Super Bomberman Party Pak*.

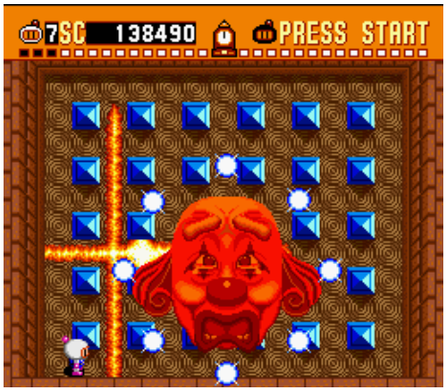
Gameplay is simple but hugely entertaining, with gamers guiding their BomberMan around a non-scrolling maze (a grid of 143 squares, placed 13 × 11), setting bombs to kill opponents and other enemies, and getting out of the way before the bombs explode. Helpful items appear as you destroy enemies, walls, and opponent BomberMen. These include extra bomb (increases the number of bombs you can lay on the ground), accelerator (increases your running speed), explosion expander (increases range of your explosions), indestructible armor (makes you impervious to explosions), remote control (detonates bombs by remote), super bomb (explosions pass through obstacles like enemies, skulls, and walls), kick (enables you to kick bombs away from where they are placed), power glove (lets you punch bombs away), and more.

There are twelve selectable battle stages, a.k.a. zones: Normal, Western, Bomb, Jump, Belt, Tunnel, Duel, Flower, Light, Power, Warp, and Speed. Destroying certain walls reveals level exits; exiting after all the enemies are destroyed clears the level. In multi-player games, the last surviving player wins. The storyline revolves around the evil Carat Diamond and his cohort, Dr. Mook, who are hosting a Robot Tournament in Diamond City to steal BomberMan's advanced combat abilities. The one-player game is a little too easy this time around and the graphics remain simplistic, but that is okay; the multi-player action will keep you and your friends entertained indefinitely.

Memories: When my children were little and my wife and I would go visit her mother in Tyler, Texas, during the late 1990s, the women and kids would go to the mall or wherever and I would strike out on my own, haunting game stores, used bookstores, thrift shops, and the like. One of my better finds during these outings was a boxed copy of *Super Bomberman Party Pak* with the multi-tap and manual included. I paid $10 at a pawn shop. It is now worth around $200.

Notable Quotable:
"An addictive game that does not become repetitious . . . The graphics in *Super Bomberman* are good and extremely cartoony. They fit the game well, as do the sounds which benefit from the fact that they do not get annoying after a long play period. But where this game excels is in the play." – *Electronic Games* (September 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"This game is the bomb! Magazine and game development houses across the globe have all missed a deadline or two to *Super Bomberman*'s charm. Certainly, the one-player adventure has its moments, but the true way to experience *Super Bomberman* is with three of your friends in multiplayer Battle Mode. It may look cute and happy, but multiplayer *Bomberman* is nothing but brutal and bloody because, once you start talking smack, the hours just disappear." – *Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Super Bomberman* the ninetieth greatest video game of all time.



Super Bomberman

Insider Insight:
While I tend to gravitate toward single-player gaming experiences overall, it is impossible to deny the unrivaled fun and excitement of a good multiplayer game—particularly when everyone is playing in the same room. *Super Bomberman* represented this on the SNES, and it was the first game to offer four-player action on the platform. Thinking back on my fondest evenings with the SNES, *Super Bomberman* definitely contributed to several of them. Whenever a group of friends was over it was pretty much guaranteed to make an appearance. Part of the game's appeal was its simplicity; the mechanics were based around planting bombs and attempting to trap your opponents. It had an almost universal board game-like appeal and was a guaranteed hit at parties. – Sam Kennedy

Insider Insight:
We were three: Jon, Laura, and Keith. From the day we met waiting for the school bus, our number caused nothing but consternation. Three is not a number equally divided. Three cannot play one-on-one basketball. Three will not evenly distribute the penny candy which always seemed to fill our pockets. Only the swing set behind Jon's house—with its three plastic seats—and bike rides to the comic book shop kept any truce.

Had we grown up in the '50s or '60s, we could have played three-player marbles without worry. Children of the '80s and '90s, though, were divided into two discrete groups: Player Ones and Player Twos. The NES—and its two controllers—always left a third of us (impatiently) waiting. Our rules dictated home field advantage won Player One, leaving the two visitors to barter and cajole for the second controller. "Take turns on lives" and "Each play one game" seem like perfectly reasonable sharing systems until you are at level 8-4 of *Super Mario Bros.* and the game cheats to kill Luigi. Hand over the controller when the game cheats? Not going to happen.

We all had NES decks, but Jon was the first to get a Super Nintendo. I remember thinking his parents had a sort of technological magic; games seemed to appear in his room before they had even been released. You can imagine my surprise—in an age before internet forums and publicized release dates—walking into Jon's room to find him and Laura playing *Super Bomberman*. Their little avatars toddled around a block maze, setting bombs that exploded in fantastic plumes of red and orange flame. The music bounced as they exploded the computer's players and each other. The game felt utterly bright and new.

I remember the darkness of the room, the midnight blue carpet, the curtains drawn. Jon and Laura sat cross-legged before the TV, faces glowing bright from the game. Two extra controllers snaked over the carpet beside them. I followed the cords to a half-moon looking hunk of plastic plugged into the player two port. I did some quick math and was left dumbfounded: four controllers?

I pointed to the peripheral (though I probably would not have known to call it a "peripheral" in 1993). "What's that?"

Neither Jon nor Laura looked away from the screen. "Super Multitap," Jon said. He always knew everything's exact name. "Four players."

I picked up the third controller like choosing Indiana Jones's Holy Grail. *Super Bomberman* felt like a discovery, like the dawning of a new age. Game mechanics quickly learned—blow up blocks, gather power-ups, blow up more blocks (and each other)—and the three of us played together. It must have been hours. All three of us playing the same game, at the same time? It felt like we had finally arrived in the future, that following three-player *Super Bomberman*, hovering skateboards and flying cars could not be long after.

Which is not to say our arguments magically disappeared. Who got to be which color sprite caused heated arguments and Jon's habit of shouting "To the victor go the spoils!" after every single win often caused friction. But we no longer needed to argue over who sat out. Now, with *Super Bomberman* and a Multitap, we could have the best possible video game argument: who was going to blow the crap out of whom in the next match. – Keith Good

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Super Bomberman 2

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: Produce.
Game Type: Maze, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Five Bad Bombers attack BomberMan and take him captive. He awakes to find himself in an underground prison cell. To escape and preserve world peace, he must battle enemies and avoid traps in the huge alien base. Thus sets the stage for *Super Bomberman 2*, which plays a lot like *Super Bomberman*, but features more intricate playfields (including scrolling) and adds a Tag Team Match in which gamers are separated into two teams that battle one other. When all the members of a team are destroyed, that team loses.

As in *Super Bomberman* and other games in the series, you guide your BomberMan around a series of mazes, setting bombs for enemies and opponents and walking away so you do not get caught in the explosion, which will extend down the maze pathways. In the Normal Game there are five stages, each with different features, such as magnets (which attract laid bombs), flames or landmines (which you should avoid, of course), cannons (which transport you to the other side), floating ground sections (which you use to reach an isolated floating island), and more. To clear a level, you must destroy all the enemies or all the capsules and find the exit. In most stages you must do both. Enemies include Munch Jump (gobbles up bombs you have laid) and Electro (emits electric energy in four directions), among others, including a boss to battle after clearing each stage.

The Battle Game features ten selectable stages, differing according to such elements as slippery ice, warp tunnels, leaves (which block your view), or conveyor belts (which can transport bombs). Destroying blocks within mazes sometimes releases helpful items. These include extra bomb (increases number of bombs laid on the ground), extra fire power (increases range of explosions), accelerator (increases your running speed), remote control (detonate bombs by remote), bomb passer (pass through bombs laid on the ground), power glove (punch bombs away), kick (kick bombs away), maximum explosion (increases number of ground squares bomb blasts travel), slime bomb (turns bombs to slime), and more. You should avoid contact with skulls, which can cause a number of unwanted effects, such as making you invisible or very slow.

Options include nine computer AI levels and an assortment of time limits, from five minutes to non-existent. You can also turn Golden Bomber on or off. By turning this feature on (in single matches only), the BomberMan who wins the match will appear in gold for the next battle and receive an extra power-up before the match begins. *Super Bomberman 2* was followed by numerous sequels and offshoots, including *Saturn Bomberman* (Saturn), *Bomberman 64* (Nintendo 64), *Bomberman World* (PlayStation), *Bomberman Online* (Dreamcast), *Bomberman Land* (Wii), and *Super Bomberman R* (Switch).

Fun Fact: The three direct SNES sequels to *Super Bomberman 2*—*Super Bomberman 3*, *Super Bomberman 4*, and *Super Bomberman 5*—were not released in the US. One of the prospective follow-ups, *Jaguar Bomberman* for the Atari Jaguar, was cancelled, though a prototype does exist.

Notable Quotable:

"The concept of this game is quite simple and I like how easy it was to pick up and play. The upbeat tones and eye-popping graphics will keep you on the edge of your couch, begging for more." – *Game Players* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Bomberman 2* simply doesn't live up to the standards set by previous *Bomberman* games. The annoying slowdown, terribly designed Battle Mode levels, and lack of five-player action make for a ho-hum experience. If you're a true *Bomberman* fan, get yourself a TTI Duo, a PC Engine adapter, and the Japanese version of *Bomberman '94*, a hugely superior game to *Super Bomberman 2* in every way." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a sequel that doesn't forget what made the first *Super Bomberman* so great. All your favorite power-ups are here . . . You'll find it typically isn't enemies or the environment that kills you, it's walking into your own explosions after you have failed to mentally map how the bombs will chain together . . . Death late in the game can be almost game-breaking, as it resets your power to almost nothing. As a result, some stages become insanely hard, as you feel underpowered and ill-equipped to take them on . . . On the flip side, though, nothing in the game poses much of a challenge to sufficiently powered-up Bomberman . . . If you are on your own, there is fun to be had with *Super Bomberman 2*, which despite the many additions remains a simple, accessible game. Yes, it is at its best with friends, but for a lone player it's not a game you should immediately dismiss." – Boxed Pixels (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

Super Bonk

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: A.I. Company.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

In 1990, *Bonk's Adventure* gave the TurboGrafx-16 a caveman mascot with a big head. *Bonk's Revenge* (1991) and *Bonk 3: Bonk's Big Adventure* (1993) followed. *Super Bonk* for the SNES—released after the demise of the TurboGrafx—has similar gameplay to the turbo-charged trilogy, but has several different elements, including less-linear level design and the ability for Bonk to move spring flowers, which send him soaring when he jumps on them.

As in *Bonk 3*, our hero can grab items to shrink or grow big. While tiny, Bonk can ride on letters spelling out RAGE!, which is a unique attack method. While Bonk is large, you can release his head from his body to roll around, squashing enemies. Other items let Bonk fly, become invincible, turn into a crab (which moves faster in water), release projectiles, use a light beam to paralyze enemies (alligators, pterodactyls, snail creatures, and the like), deploy egg grenades, become a dinosaur (which attacks with its tail), and more.

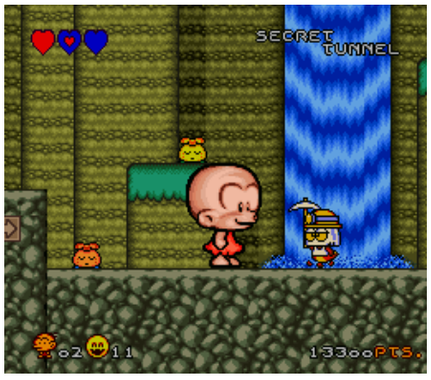
Bonk walks and jumps of course, and he can swim, but he has an unconventional battle method, as he uses his head to attack, including diving and spinning attacks. Also strange is that he uses his teeth to climb cliffs, trees, and poles, and to swing on branches. *Super Bonk* does not control as smoothly as the various *Super Mario* titles (or as smoothly as the other games in its own series), but it is still a fun, colorful, and even surreal game with a variety of creative environments to explore, including China Town, Jurassic Sea, Lava Cavern, Flower Maze, Anti-Gravity Room, Twilight Jungle, inside a dinosaur, and on the surface of the moon. There are eight different bonus stages, including a side-scrolling shooter.

Known in Europe as *Super B.C. Kid* and in Japan as *Chō Genjin*. The direct sequel, *Chō Genjin 2* (a.k.a. *Super Bonk 2*), was only released in Japan. *Bonk: Brink of Extinction* for the Xbox 360, PS3, and Wii was to follow, but it was cancelled.

Notable Quotable:
"Bonk's furious forehead bangs with a few new twists, but it leaves you wondering if this caveboy will ever evolve into anything other than a cute platform hopper." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"All the zany enemies and environments and the extremely forgiving gameplay make *Super Bonk* a great platformer for someone who is truly awful at platformers or finds Mario to be too intimidating . . . it has the sort of energy and atmosphere only a child can appreciate. I still like this game for what it is." – ProJared (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"For those of us accustomed to seeing the little caveman in prehistoric worlds, it's kind of shocking to see him in front of a modern city skyline in the first stage . . . In the original game, it was a challenge to send Bonk into a rage, but here it happens early and often . . . I must admit it's fun to plow through buildings in his 'Bonkzilla' form. There's some good stuff here, but the watered-down difficulty ruins the game . . . The easy bonus stages are so common you eventually make an effort to avoid them. Other missteps include an ill-conceived power-up that lets you build bridges (really?) and a boss named Blue Balls (c'mon now). I'll give the developers credit for cramming every Bonk-ism they could think of into this cartridge, but without the challenge it's an unsatisfying romp." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Insider Insight:
Super Bonk is not a great game. *Super Bonk* is barely a good game in its best moments. It is a cheap cash-in, lacking most of the charm of the TurboGrafx-16 games that spawned the franchise. When it was released in 1994, so many of us were looking forward to the polygonal revolution the so-called "next-gen consoles" such as Sega Saturn promised. *Super Bonk* was primitive by 1994 SNES standards, and felt painfully stuck in the Stone Age in comparison to what was about to come to market. Had it not been part of the Bonk franchise I would not own it. Had it not been part of the Bonk franchise I would have forgotten about it.

Then, as it so often does, time passed. My passion for Bonk never subsided, and I decided to give *Super Bonk* another chance. To my surprise, with all its faults intact, I assigned a new feeling to that crude cash-in: appreciation. I was not ready to accept the developer's vision for *Super Bonk* upon release, but it has grown on me. It is crude to class my shift in attitude as a simple case of nostalgia, but that type of semantic quibbling is beside the point. Video games do not change, but gamers do. I could not be happier to amend my opinion of this less-than-super Bonk title, and chances are, your *Super Bonk* might be waiting for you to rediscover. What better time than now? – Rob Faraldi

Insider Insight:
I was introduced to the Bonk franchise in 1994. It was the year my brother-in-law was sent to Iraq, so I moved in with my sister to help care for my nephew, Aaron. He was about four years old and became my shadow. He watched me play *Bonk's Adventure* for the TurboGrafx for hours, so much so that he started head-butting everything in the house.

After many months, my brother-in-law came home on leave and took a nap on the floor while watching TV. My nephew climbed to the top of the couch and performed a perfect flying head butt. I could not stop laughing as I realized the cries of pain were not from Aaron, but my brother-in-law. My sister could not believe Aaron did that without getting hurt. I simply said it was because he was Super Bonk!

Fast forward a few years, and I came across the game *Super Bonk*. While it is a great platformer, I would have bought it regardless, as it brings back such great memories of my nephew. To this day, I can't help but smile when I play. I love the simple cartoon feel. I even love the way Bonk goes crazy after eating big hunks of meat. Any game with a character named King Droop must be good, but nothing tops the notion that *Super Bonk* was made with my nephew in mind—even if only in my head. – Barry Shank

Super Bowling

Publisher: American Technos.
Developer: Athena/Technos Japan.
Game Type: Sports/Bowling, 1–4 players (alternating).
Year: 1992.

Although much easier than the real sport, *Super Bowling* is a likable game with cute graphics, good controls, and lots of features. After selecting from four different cartoonish looking bowlers (each with varying strengths and weaknesses), eight different ball weights (8–16 pounds), and three different oil distances (short, middle, and long), you set your position on the lane, adjust the hook of the ball, and try to get the power you want. You view the action from behind your bowler, then the camera follows the ball down the lane. Meters move quickly, but high scores are nevertheless a common occurrence.

The game features two difficulty levels—normal and hard—and three modes of play: Turkey Bowl (standard ten pin rules), Practice (where you can arrange the pins), and Golf (try to score under par for each frame by knocking down pins in as few shots as possible). *Super Bowling* for the SNES is not to be confused with *Super Bowling* for the Nintendo 64, a game from a different company featuring more viewpoints, various environments, and those patented muddy N64 3D graphics.

Notable Quotable:

"If you're going to make a video adaptation of bowling, this is about as close as you can get to making it entertaining." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"While it doesn't rack up to the real thing, at least *Super Bowling* has a sense of humor—an animated green chicken comments on the action, the on-screen players make funny faces when they throw gutter balls, and there's a 'golf ball' option that lets you alleviate bowling's inherent lack of excitement by assigning pars for different pin setups." – *Entertainment Weekly* (October 1992)

Insider Insight:

As a middle-class Irish kid in Brooklyn, bowling was practically in my blood. My parents bowled in a league, and while my brother was known more for the trouble he caused in bowling alleys, I was an avid bowler. It made sense that we spent a ton of time with *Super Bowling* on the SNES, because it was a game we could all play together.

Until I was around eighteen, my father was the best bowler in the family. My mother, like her prowess in *Side Pocket*, was the queen of *Super Bowling*, but eventually I broke down the game and could bowl 300 games at will. I could never do it with my family around, though. Between my dad's fierce competitive nature and my brother's hilarity, I could never focus. And when I told them I threw over a dozen perfect games they never believed me. It got to the point where I came up with a solution; rather than play together, they could watch me do it.

So on a cold December day in 1995, I threw twelve strikes in a row, from the same exact spot, with virtually the same amount of power and spin. It was a series of about thirty precise button presses that my parents and brother could not believe. After that game I never played again, and my parents never asked me to play again.

Twenty-two years later I still own the same copy of the game, and although covered in a small film of dust it is a constant reminder that, for a few minutes, I did exactly what I said I would, despite the fact that the people who knew me best never thought I could.
– Patrick Hickey Jr.

Super Buster Bros.

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Action Puzzle/ Non-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

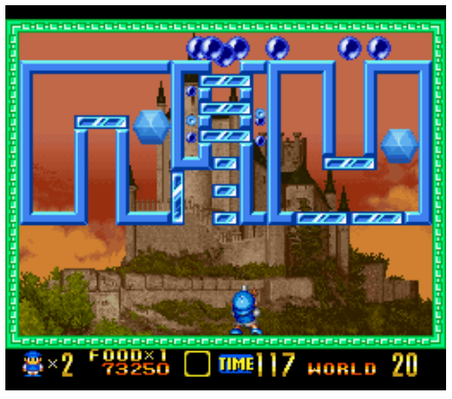
Known outside the US as *Super Pang*, *Super Buster Bros.* is an intriguing, addicting, highly entertaining mix of shooter and puzzler. As a Super Buster Brother, it is your job to clear the world of bubbles. You do this by running back and forth along the bottom of the play field, firing a vertical harpoon weapon up at said bubbles that bounce around. Bubbles pop if they hit the point of the harpoon or the rope it is attached to. You should dodge the bubbles, of course, and some screens have ladders, barriers, and breakable bricks that affect your movement, as well as that of the bubbles. When you shoot a bubble, it divides into two bubbles. The largest bubbles split four times before getting small enough to destroy. You must clear all the bubbles in a stage within the time limit to advance.

As you go about your bubble-busting business you can grab power-ups and items, such as double harpoon, machine gun, grapple (similar to harpoon, but briefly remains in place when it touches a platform), clocks (freeze the balloons and creatures), food (points), extra lives, and bubble barriers (which shield your character). The coolest weapon is a spread fire type gun similar to the one in *Contra*. One interesting item is the dynamite, which damages all the bubbles on the screen. It is great for clearing small bubbles, but will make the screen super crowded if there are several large bubbles. Creatures—including dragons, fish, and birds—do things like drop items, pop bubbles, or temporarily prevent you from firing your weapon.

Super Buster Bros. features two modes of play. In Panic Mode, bubbles pour down for ninety-nine levels, and you advance a level each time a meter at the bottom of the screen gets full. In Tour Mode, which features four levels of difficulty (easy, normal, hard, and expert), you travel the world, busting bubbles in such locations as Germany, Canada, Brazil, and the Caribbean Sea, with background graphics to match. Unlike the arcade version of the game that Capcom released in 1990, the SNES game lacks a two-player (co-op) mode. This is regrettable in an otherwise quality title.

Notable Quotable:
"This game has been successfully ported straight from the arcade. Although I usually find that this type of game is not my style, I have to admit, it quickly becomes addicting. My only complaint is that it should have been two-player." – *GameFan Magazine* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Tactics quickly become important. Sure, you could shoot all the easy-to-hit big bubbles, but then you'll find you have too many small bubbles on your hands to handle. Choosing the best approach in such a short space of time can be exhilarating and often punishing—one wrong move and you're dead . . . When you shoot a grapple hook, it attaches itself to the ceiling and stays there for a few seconds, or until a bubble hits it. This can be useful, but while it's stuck there you cannot shoot another hook, and you can't get rid of the power-up until you pick up another weapon. This often leads to you running away from bubbles in a mad panic that rarely ends well . . . The backgrounds can become a little uninspired at times, but for the most part the visuals stand up pretty well—you don't need HD graphics to enjoy this one. The audio isn't too bad, either. The odd track can become highly irritating—especially when you end up playing for prolonged periods on a level you just can't seem to beat—but the majority of the music is fun and has a habit of getting stuck in your head for a couple of days after playing. The diversity across the many levels, which modify themselves depending on the difficulty, is actually pretty impressive and there's a lot of fun to be had . . . It's definitely worth a look for the high-score chasers out there." – Andy Green (www.nintendolife.com)

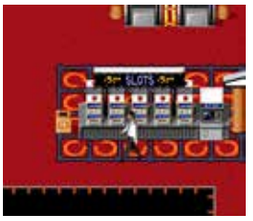


Insider Insight:
I used to play *Super Buster Bros.* in the mall arcade in West Lafayette, Indiana, with my buddy, Wei. We were quite awful at the game, and during combined multi-player mode we were even worse! He pretty much demanded that I play with him, and although I liked the game, I was living on a shoestring budget at the time and loathed the idea with each token dropped into the machine.

I was relieved a year later when the game was released on the Super Nintendo and we could hide our shame in the privacy of our own dorm rooms. The high price tag of the cartridge was still a better deal than the never-ending supply of tokens feeding the coin-op. We could have purchased the game several times over with all the coins we dropped while waiting for the SNES release. – Michael Thomasson

Super Caesars Palace

Publisher: Virgin Games.
Developer: Illusions Gaming Company.
Game Type: Gambling, 1 player.
Year: 1993.



Super Caesars Palace lets you walk around three floors of the popular Las Vegas casino and play nine gambling games (up from just five for *Caesars Palace* for the NES): craps, horse racing, video poker, blackjack, red dog, slots, roulette, keno, and scratchers. While maneuvering through the casino—including up and down escalators—you can interact with non-playable characters (for advice and clues), enter VIP rooms after you win big bucks, and hit up ATM machines for withdrawing money, tracking your winnings, and playing the aforementioned scratchers: 60-yard fight, match two, and triple jacks.

After selecting a gambling sim, you guide a large, disembodied hand around the screen, performing such functions as pressing buttons, pulling a slot machine handle, placing poker chips, and scratching off squares (to reveal objects in scratchers). You begin the game with $2,000. After playing, you leave the casino in a limo, a Greyhound bus, or a taxi. Long, unwieldy passwords save your winnings, and the game is compatible with the Super NES Mouse. Although few other patrons are present, the game has a nice presentation and solid interfacing. Released for the Genesis as *Caesars Palace*, *Super Caesars Palace* is a follow-up to *Caesars Palace* for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and NES.

Memories: While I was intrigued by the notion of going to Las Vegas and checking out the neon and such opulent casinos as Caesar's Palace, I never went until 2003. My wife and I flew in for the Classic Gaming Expo, which hosted such guests as *Donkey Kong* and *Pac-Man* player Billy Mitchell and renowned video game scorekeeper Walter Day. It was the first large retro gaming convention that I had been to and I had an absolute blast. We enjoyed Vegas as well, walking around wide-eyed and dropping the occasional quarter in the occasional slot machine, laughing like giddy school girls as we went.

Notable Quotable:
"The variety of games, sharp graphics, inclusion of more obscure games like red dog, and easy-to-use interface make *Super Caesars Palace* a sure bet." – *Game Informer* (April 2000)

Notable Quotable:
"I always thought it was pretty cool that I had a character I could walk around with, even though he looks like the long-lost cousin of Dilbert . . . a good little game and very nostalgic for many" – PushingUpRoses (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"*Super Caesars Palace* is obviously a very realistic casino simulator because I blew $2,000 in about 15 minutes . . . The controls are simple . . . easy to get into and quite entertaining . . . This is one of the better gambling titles I've played." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Super Castlevania IV

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

Transylvanian legend has it that every 100 years, Dracula is revived and grows bigger, badder, meaner, and nastier than ever. For generations, the Belmont family has kept Dracula in check and prevented him from transforming all of humanity into creatures of darkness. Now, 100 years have passed since the last clash of the Belmonts and the infamous vampire. In *Super Castlevania IV*—the sequel to *Castlevania III: Dracula's Curse* for the NES—it is up to you as Simon Belmont to explore the giant, multi-tiered Castle of the Undead and its surroundings, including dungeons, forests, graveyards, mountains, and other spooky areas. You will climb stairs, kill monsters, jump over gaps, duck under spikes and other obstacles, and eventually confront old fang-face himself, Count Dracula.

Throughout the entire adventure you wield a mystical whip that can be upgraded in length and is more versatile than in previous games in the series. In addition to whipping enemies, it can be used as a rope for swinging over gaps, and you can wave it around. Additional weapons, which you acquire by destroying candelabras situated throughout the castle, include daggers, firebombs, boomerangs, and axes. You can also pick up watches for use in freezing your enemies and crosses that destroy all on-screen enemies. Other helpful items include double shots; triple shots; hearts, which give you ammo for your weapons; invisibility potion, which briefly makes you invulnerable; small and large pork chops, which partially revive your health; and money bags, which award you with extra points. Certain blocks can be destroyed to reveal hidden items.

At the end of each of the game's eleven fright-filled levels you will face a boss character(s), such as the Frankenstein monster, a giant Zapf Bat, the Dancing Spectres (Paula Abghoul and Fred Askare), and a mummy named Akmodan II. Defeating a boss restores your lost power and allows you to continue to the next level. Standard enemies include bats, gargoyles, mermen, flying Medusa heads, ghosts, disembodied horse heads (called Mr. Hed), killer caskets, skeletal knights, viper swarms, and the like.

Everything about *Super Castlevania IV* is great, from the whip-wielding hero you control, to the scary monsters you battle, to the atmospheric music and sound effects. The controls are excellent, the game is challenging but beatable, and the standard weapon is fantastic, while at the same time it is refreshing to use projectiles and other weapons. Graphically the game is a knockout, with rich coloring, detailed creatures and surroundings, Mode 7 effects, and parallax scrolling.

Followed by an assortment of sequels, including *Castlevania: Bloodlines* (Genesis), *Castlevania: Dracula X* (SNES), *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* (PlayStation), *Castlevania: Legacy of Darkness* (Nintendo 64), *Castlevania: Circle of the Moon* (Game Boy Advance), *Castlevania: Lament of Innocence* (PlayStation 2), *Castlevania Judgment* (Wii), and *Castlevania: Lords of Shadow—Mirror of Fate* (3DS, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360), among others.

Notable Quotable:

"To the Japanese, *Super Castlevania IV* is a remake of the original *CV* game and does not occupy a different space in the official timeline. But what a remake it is! Everything is improved. The graphics and music obviously benefit, but it is the gameplay that has been the most finely tuned, with Simon having midair jump control and eight-directional whipping . . . Quite exciting and still fun visually to this day are stages like the rotating cylindrical rooms with enemy coffins that are visible in the background and emerge as you make your way forward. Jumping from the huge chandeliers while the background flashes red and black is a visual feast . . . The SNES sound chip is working overtime in this game putting out great remixes like 'Beginning' and 'Vampire Killer,' one of the best versions of 'Bloody Tears' in the entire game saga, and new classics like 'Simon's Theme' and the 'Caves.' A great composing effort by Souji Taro and Masanori

Super Castlevania IV

Adachi and a wonderful sign of great SNES scores to come!" – Original Gamer (www.original-gamer.com)

Notable Quotable:

"We were so excited to work on the new console, as we felt we'd done everything we could on the Famicom [Japanese NES] without additional chips in the cartridge . . . We started with a small R&D team, without actual dev kits. We only had a hard copy of specification documents. The Super Famicom [Japanese SNES] was definitely more powerful than the Famicom, especially in graphics and sound, but the CPU is a bit more difficult to work with, as it's more like a slightly faster 8-bit CPU with integrated bank registers. Unlike modern consoles, we had access to all the hardware registers, and we had to figure out how to use those effectively, which I really enjoyed. But it took us some time and experiments to find the right ways to use various tricks during actual gameplay . . . The expectations were really high, as it was already a successful franchise and now on the new 'super' hardware. Personally, I liked the original *CV* best back then. Of course, I played them all before we finalized the direction of *CVIV*. I wanted to make *CVIV* a pure action game without any RPG elements, similar to the original *CV* . . . Because the team was small, everybody was involved in the design. Some ideas came from creative artists and others were from programmer's experiments . . . We drew maps on paper, but I think we changed a lot as we iterated the game . . . The original *CV* is a great game, but I felt it was too difficult and many players got frustrated. The changes in 'stair behavior' [being able to freely leap on and off stairs] was to give more control to the players and reduce frustration." – *Super Castlevania IV* director and lead programmer Masahiro Ueno (credited in the game as Jun Furano), interviewed in *Retro Gamer* magazine #119

Insider Insight:

By the time the SNES hit North America I was a card-carrying member of the "Genesis Does" club. I think that is the reason I was thoroughly unimpressed with *Super Castlevania IV* when I first played it. I stuck up my nose, convinced of the superiority of my beloved Genesis and brand new *Sonic* cartridge, and convinced myself that Konami had lost its touch.

After I had gotten over myself I had a chance to play *Super Castlevania IV* once again, and it is safe to say it was love at second sight. I think it was the music that really hooked me. The soundtrack is superb and totally helped me appreciate everything else that was on display.

Playing this game today, I love it for the fact that it is one of those early SNES titles that did everything possible to show off all the graphical tricks on the system. It reminds me a lot of Capcom's *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*, where the special effects sometimes took precedence over playability or performance. But who really cared back in the day? These games felt like playing the future! – Greg Sewart

Insider Insight:

In 1991, my best friend Chris and I learned that a game that we had both been dying to play, *Super Castlevania IV*, would be released for the holidays. As Chris had an SNES and I didn't, we knew he would have to get the game if we wanted to play it. He dropped a couple hints but could not be sure he would get it until Christmas morning.

One day I received a call from Chris's mom. "What was that game that Chris wants so badly?" she asked.

"*Super Castlevania IV*," I replied.

"That's right," she said, as I heard paper rustling in the background. "Here it is!" She must have been looking through a holiday catalog. "Please don't say anything to Christopher about this," she added. I promised I would not say anything, and I didn't, though keeping that secret certainly was not easy, especially when conversation turned to how awesome it would be when we finally got to play it.

Eventually Christmas Eve rolled around and my phone rang. It was Chris with sad news. His family was going out of town for Christmas, but he added he had been allowed to open presents early. "Listen to this!" he shouted.

Suddenly I heard music; full SNES-style orchestral music. It was the classic *Castlevania* theme song, "Vampire Killer," echoing through the tinny phone speaker.

"YES!" I shouted. I could not wait to play! Then I remembered he would be out of town for a few days. "You need to call me the minute you get back so I can play it for myself." I said.

Chris stalled. "I don't know. Mom told me that you knew I was getting it." His voice got quiet, "You couldn't tell me? I thought we were friends."

I started to feel worried. He was joking, right? "Dude, I promised your mom I wouldn't!" I yelped.

"I know," he laughed. "I'm just messing with you." – Rob Strangman

Super Chase H.Q.

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: Taito.
Game Type: Demolition/ Combat Racing, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Unlike *Chase H.Q. II* for the Genesis, which is similar to Taito's *Chase H.Q.* coin-op (1988), *Super Chase H.Q.* for the SNES is a port of Taito's *Super Chase: Criminal Termination* (1992). Viewing the twisting, turning street through the windshield of (as opposed to from behind) the car, the game has a more limited view than other games in the series, but it is still a blast to play, and it has nice graphics. In addition to the road ahead, you can see your character's hands steering the wheel and his reflection in the rearview mirror.

Racing is fast, especially when you use a turbo, as you maneuver to pass other cars while trying to make it to the bad guy's vehicle. When you catch up to the criminal car, you should smash into it several times until it is destroyed, but be careful, because the bad guy will shoot at you. You should also avoid roadside streetlights and palm trees, but this isn't hard to do. Passing cars is also pretty easy.

Both your car and the enemy have a damage meter, and the cars have damage modeling (hoods and trunks get smashed in, bullets put holes through your windshield)—an unusual feature for the era. Story segments prior to each mission add to the fun, as do digitized voice effects and a rocking soundtrack.

On the back of the box for the Game Boy version of *Super Chase H.Q.* it says, "The hottest Super NES driving game comes to Game Boy!" Followed by *Chase H.Q.: Secret Police* (Game Boy Color) and *Ray Tracers* (PlayStation), the latter of which is not a sequel, but a spiritual successor.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Chase H.Q.* brought home the magic of the original . . . a thrilling retro arcade racer . . . the graphics are rather lovely: the view area's smallish, but the environments are vibrant and nicely drawn." – Retro Gamer (www.retrogamer.net)

Notable Quotable:

"Before each mission you're provided with a little background story about a heist in progress, and for once you can actually understand your radio partner . . . The driving animation is smooth, and the collision detection is extremely forgiving. Navigating through traffic is practically effortless, and you're not likely to hit the palm trees and light posts lining the road. Driving under the occasional overpass looks awesome. The shiny dashboard looks impressive with hands moving the steering wheel and interacting with the controls . . . The digitized sounds are amazing, and the thumping guitar is like something from an old cop show." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

I loved *Chase H.Q.* in the arcades during the late '80s. Chasing shady suspects and ramming into their vehicles at high speeds was just so appealing! Come the turn of the decade, the game seemed rather elusive in my area. All the coin-ops had apparently broken down or moved on to other locales. Regardless of the reason, I really missed the game. As a result, I was delighted when the spiritual successor, *Super Chase H.Q.*, was published on the Super Nintendo.

While not the same, and relatively short with only five levels, it did the trick quite nicely. I still play the game routinely to this day. If you dig the classic car chase scenes during '70s cop shows or ever dreamed of being a member of the NYPD, this game is . . . Super. It's even in the title, and Taito would never lie. – Michael Thomasson

Super Conflict

Publisher: Vic Tokai.
Developer: Manley & Associates.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

War may be hell in real life, but you can simulate the horrors of military conflict from the safety and comfort of your own home with *Super Conflict*. You take control of your own land, air, and sea military forces. Units include fighters, bombers, helicopters, tanks, anti-aircraft, anti-tank, infantry commandos, destroyers, submarines, cruisers, battleships, and aircraft carriers. You must determine which units should battle and when.

In the one-player game, you wage war against the computer through five skill levels and fifty-five different scenarios. In the two-player head-to-head mode, consisting of sixteen scenarios, player one commands Blue forces while player two commands Red forces. Two-player games cannot be saved, but battery backup allows you to save one-player progress.

The overall goals are to accumulate production points and destroy the opposing side's Flag Unit, which functions similarly to the King in chess. In levels 1–4, the Flag Unit is a tank. In level five, there is also a Flag Ship. The various scenario maps (game boards) are divided into hexagons that have different colors and textures representing different types of terrain: plains, desert, hills, woods, mountains, sea, bridge, city, airport, and factory. Terrain affects each player's defenses and mobility, making it more than just an aesthetic consideration. Cities, airports, and shipyards can be used to re-supply units and repair damages.

Super Conflict offers two basic types of play: Short and Long. Short focuses on strategic elements of play (the computer automatically decides outcome based on variables involved), while Long lets you take full control of units during up to four rounds of action for each battle. The sequel to *Conflict* (NES), *Super Conflict* has similar gameplay but better graphics, more scenarios, and a Gulf War-like setting.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Conflict* is most immediately comparable to Nintendo's Game Boy Advance masterpiece *Advance Wars*, only not as good." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are rubbish, sure, but that's not what wargames are all about. They're all about strategy, and that's where *Super Conflict* begins to fall down. To win a round, all you've got to do is destroy the computer's Flag Tank. And that's ridiculous, as, even if you're outnumbered 10 to 1, as long as you've got a couple of tanks to go in and sort out the computer's Flag Tank, you keep on winning. Everything else just falls by the wayside. If the computer used the same approach things might work out, sort of. But it just doesn't realize what's going on. Overall verdict, not only is this about 10 years behind what's going on in the war gaming world, it doesn't even work properly." – *Super Play* (June 1993)

Insider Insight:

Though PCs had made inroads, strategy wargamers in the 1980s were still mostly tied to the tabletop. The NES, which had a simple turn-based combat game in *Desert Commander*, received its best title in the genre at the turn of the decade: Vic Tokai's *Conflict*. *Conflict* combined a hex map with a tactical combat system to allow opposing modern armies—blue and red, armed with American and Soviet weapons—to battle across sixteen different scenarios. Just in time for the first Gulf War!

Super Conflict—the 1993 SNES sequel—preserves the look and many of the gameplay elements. There are triple the scenario maps, but unlike *Conflict*, where only the final battle needed unlocking, players must advance progressively through the setups. There is a tutorial effect, as air and sea battle and factory production are saved until later. An advantage is the ability to save positions, although only at the scenario picker level.

The tactical one-on-one battle scenes offer the player far fewer choices than *Conflict*, though that speeds them along. Fights can be accelerated into one-shot exchanges, which saves time but turns the game into a chess match and eliminates one of the main human advantages: ammunition management. The AI does okay in one-player games, though it tends to target weak units to the exclusion of other objectives. As with *Desert Commander* and *Conflict*, scenarios are won by knocking out headquarters units; players who have developed their positions carefully will often throw everything into the meat grinder for a shot against a suddenly exposed flag tank.

Modern wargamers will find mechanics common to later games lacking. Units cannot stack, do not get flanking benefits, and generate no zones of control; a unit can happily roll through an opening between a wall of attackers. But if *Super Conflict* wasn't the leap forward *Conflict* was, it is still enough to make it one of the best strategic warfare games for the Super NES. – John Jackson Miller

Super Double Dragon

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: American Technos.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

The fourth game in the *Double Dragon* series, *Super Double Dragon* is a Super NES exclusive. Players guide brothers Billy and Jimmy Lee through seven missions of fighting action, all in an attempt to rescue narcotics investigator and martial arts trainer Marion, who has disappeared while trying to infiltrate the criminal gang known as the Black Shadow Warriors. Missions, each of which contains a boss to battle at the end, include Las Vegas, Airport, Chinatown, Golden Gate Bridge (where you will be fighting on a trailer), City Slum, Mountain/Forest Area, and Duke's Mansion.

As either Billy or Jimmy, you can punch, kick, defend, jump, ride elevators, and walk right, left, up, down, diagonally, and up and down stairs. Billy can do such moves as back fist, uppercut, foot side kick, and reverse round kick, while Jimmy can straight punch and do a hook. Both can perform a wide assortment of other moves, such as continuous kick, jump kick, flying back kick, grab hair/knee kick, grab hair/elbow punch, and grab arm/back kick, among others. There are also four special techniques that are usable when your power gauge is charged: round back fist, jumping round kick, jumping back round kick, and roundhouse kick.

To help battle the various thugs, former boxing champions, martial arts experts, swordsmen, and other bad guys you will encounter, you can pick up weapons on the ground or grab them from enemies. Weapons include knives (which you throw), boomerangs, fire bombs, drum cans (throw or kick), rocks (throw or kick), nunchukas (Billy's favorite weapon), and konbo sticks (Jimmy's favorite weapon).

The game looks and plays in the basic mold of the NES installments of *Double Dragon*, but does include some new features, including more-detailed graphics, smoother animation, more fighting moves, and some defensive maneuvers. Unlike the NES version of the original *Double Dragon*—and like most of the games in the series—a second player can join in. In Mode A you cannot damage each other, making for a pure co-op experience, but in Mode B you can, creating more of a competition between players.

The last *Double Dragon* game created by the original Technos team, *Super Double Dragon* was followed by a number of sequels, including *Double Dragon V: The Shadow Falls*, which you can read about in *The SNES Omnibus: The Super Nintendo and Its Games, Vol. 1 (A–M)*. As of this writing, *Double Dragon IV* for the PlayStation 4 and Switch is the most recent game in the series.

Notable Quotable:

"It's a solid beat-'em-up that's more fun in two-player mode. A compulsory purchase for followers of the series." – *N-Force* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"If you like fighting games, then this is your game! *Super Double Dragon* is definitely the best fighting game for the SNES. With more moves (lots more), great colors, and SNES sound, *Double Dragon* gets a major 16-bit facelift." – *GameFan Magazine* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"I find it shameful that magazines once heaped praise upon this pathetic game . . . plodding and repetitive, with controls that lack that 'crisp' feel you need in a side-scrolling brawler . . . exceedingly easy . . . excruciating pace. There are some nice hold moves and a cool roundhouse kick, but punching is your best weapon, since that defeats foes even when you don't make contact . . . the sharp, colorful visuals are striking, and the soundtrack truly kicks ass. Once you get past the flashy presentation, however, the gameplay falls somewhere between boring and unbearable." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

The *Double Dragon* series is one of my favorite beat-'em-up franchises of all time. While I never really experienced the arcade games back in the day, I especially enjoy part two on the NES. *Super Double Dragon* is perhaps my second favorite in the franchise.The game controls much differently than the other games in the series, and that is why I am drawn to it! Instead of simply mashing on the buttons like the early games, or having to manipulate the level aspects like in *Double Dragon III*, *Super Double Dragon* is all about utilizing the newly implemented techniques to counter and destroy your enemies.

As is true for most beat-'em-ups, the game is all about timing, and it is very satisfying to counter an enemy's punch—which you actually catch with your hands—and then pummel them into oblivion! I can almost see the look of disbelief on their faces as they know that at that point they are done for. Throw two skilled players into the mix and things become really fun! The key is just knowing that this game isn't a button-masher like many other beat-'em-ups and requires a bit more of an analytical approach to take out the slew of enemies. Just make sure you don't get surrounded, as you will definitely get your ego knocked down a peg or two! – Jeffrey Wittenhagen

Super Earth Defense Force

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Jaleco.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

It is the year 4129, and Earth is under attack. AGYMA—a mysterious organization of unknown origin—is threatening the formerly peaceful universe. As commander of the XA-1, you must shoot tons of mechanical flying enemies, take out AGYMA's bases of operations, and defeat its six big bosses. The ship you pilot is equipped with eight selectable weapons rated according to speed, power, and rapidity (or reload speed). You can only use these weapons one at a time, but you can switch weapons at the beginning of the game, between levels, or after your ship is destroyed. The further into the game you get, the more powerful your weapons will become. To complement your weaponry, your ship is accompanied by two invincible satellite ships. Your ship is also equipped with shields (indicated by three green markers at the top of the screen) and four flying speeds.

The six stages in the game will take you over the city of Megalopolis, above the clouds of Earth, in an underwater cavern, on the far side of the moon, into a meteor shower, and to AGYMA's headquarters, a steel fortress protected by a plethora of enemy fighters. *Super Earth Defense Force* is a port of the 1991 Jaleco arcade game, which was simply called *Earth Defense Force*. The SNES version lacks the two-player simultaneous mode, but includes a couple new stages and four new weapons: explode, seek laser, photon, and grenade (returning weapons include Vulcan, laser, atomic, and homing). Gameplay is fairly typical, with players blasting their way through hordes of alien ships and mechanical creatures. Fans of such games as *Thunder Force III*, *Gaiares*, and *R-Type III* should enjoy *Super Earth Defense Force*, which lacks the word "Super" on the front of the box and on the cartridge.

Notable Quotable:
"This shooter has a lot of potential, much of which is realized with some nice graphics and a varied compliment of weapons." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Is it better than *Super R-Type*? Well, yes, it is actually, because it doesn't slow down as much. Better than *U.N. Squadron*? Hmmm . . . that's a tricky one. Suffice to say that all Super Famicom-owning action freaks shouldn't hesitate in adding this to their collection. We're still waiting to see Nintendo's little marvel pushed to its limit, but until that day comes this'll do nicely." – *Advanced Computer Entertainment* (January 1992)

Insider Insight:
When I think of shooters for the SNES three games come to mind: *Super R-Type*, *Phalanx*, and *Super Earth Defense Force*. I was fortunate enough to score a copy of *Super E.D.F.* for around $10 brand new during the store closing sale at my local Child World in Williamsville, just outside Buffalo, New York. Child World was charging double that for just about all the other SNES games in their liquidation sale, so my hopes were not very high that it would be a quality title—so much so that I actually didn't bother opening the game until a few days afterward.
The day finally came to open *Super E.D.F.* and check it out in all its 16-bit glory, and wow, what a great game! It has a memorable soundtrack, responsive controls, a nice mix of power-ups, arcade-quality graphics, lots of parallax scrolling layers, and some really cool Mode 7 scaling effects in later levels. I truly cannot say enough about this game!
The only minor complaint I have with *Super E.D.F.* is that it goes from super fun in the first few levels, with a nice balance of difficulty, to ridiculously hard after level four. I was never able to finish the game back in the day, but thanks to some Game Genie codes I got around to finishing it a few years ago. And what a blast I had reliving this under-appreciated gem! – Russ Kumro

Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

In *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts*—an excellent game that plays as great as it looks—you take on the role of Arthur, the boldest knight in the land. You must rescue Princess Guinevere, who has been captured by the evil emperor Sardius and spirited away to the slimy crypts of the Phantom Zone. As you journey through the game's eight levels, you will be haunted and challenged by any number of undead creatures, such as zombies, skeletons, vampires, man-eating plants, and of course ghouls and ghosts, all of which are fun to slay. It seems the Ghoul Realm has revived and the entire kingdom has been shrouded under an eerie spell.

You begin the adventure wielding a deadly lance and decked out in an ordinary suit of armor. As you run, jump, duck, climb, hack, and slash your way through the game you can pick up daggers, crossbows, scythes, torches, axes, and tri-blades. When you gain a new weapon you will forfeit your old one. Special weapons of enchantment, such as magic versions of the standard weapons, will appear only when you are wearing the bronze or golden armor, both of which can be found at various points in the levels. The golden armor will also let you perform seven different magic spells that can do such things as expose hidden treasure, summon a fire dragon, and disintegrate all on-screen enemies.

The setting for the game is a dazzling combination of fantasy and horror. Levels include The Dead Palace (with The Haunted Graveyard and The Forest of Fear), The Rotting Sea (with The Graveyard of Ships and The Sea of Despair), the Vermilion of Horror (with Crucible of Flame and Towers of Molten Steel), The Ghoul's Stomach, The Deep Chill (with Ice Forest and Ice Wall), The Castle of Emperor, Hallway of Ghouls, and The Throne Room. At the end of each level you must destroy a boss character called a Foul Guardian. A plethora of obstacles, creatures, and treasures lie between you and the Throne Room, a place where only the power of Guinevere's enchanted bracelet can destroy Sardius.

Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts offers plenty of challenges, even to the most seasoned of gamers, but it is not quite as brutally difficult or as frustrating as *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, which hit the arcades in 1985, and gained fame (some would say infamy) on the NES in 1986. *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was also released for the Game Boy Advance and New Nintendo 3DS. Other games in this popular series include *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* (arcade, Genesis, various), *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* (PSP), *Ghosts 'n Goblins: Gold Knights* (iOS), and *Ghosts 'n Goblins: Gold Knights II* (iOS). Plus there are several spin-offs: *Gargoyle's Quest* (Game Boy), *Gargoyle's Quest II* (NES), *Demon's Crest* (SNES), *Maximo: Ghosts to Glory* (PlayStation 2), and *Maximo vs. Army of Zin* (PlayStation 2).

Memories: I played the heck out of *Ghosts 'n Goblins*, which I received with my NES during Christmas 1987 (I still own the original boxed copy). The reason I played it so much, other than the fact that it was fun, is that it was so difficult, and I was determined to make it to the end. Unfortunately, unlike *Castlevania* and a few other early NES favorites, I never could finish the game, but it was not for a lack of trying. Picking up a copy of *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* was a no-brainer when I first got my SNES in 1992 or early 1993, and I was able to beat it (after many, many tries), partly because it had better controls. My favorite "modern" video game of all time is *Maximo: Ghosts to Glory* (PS2), a hardcore 3D hack-and-slash title I have beaten three times.

Notable Quotable:

"It's a difficult choice, but *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* gets the nod from me for best in the series (just barely). Its major faults—no shooting up and slowdown—can be overlooked by fantastic visuals and, more importantly, great gameplay. Its legendary difficulty can be considered good or bad. If you want an old-school challenge, look no further than this. If you want a fun little game to breeze through, then move along, this will own you." – Lens of Truth (www.lensoftruth.com)

Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are truly fab, the range of weapons available is vast, and the power-up armor adds just a hint of strategy. The only niggle as far as I'm concerned is the incredible difficulty. Even on beginner level, Sir Arthur's quest is quite unfeasibly hard; easy level is next up and the use of the word 'easy' is an obvious and terrible lie. Best of all, though, is the music. It's kind of like a Hollywood B movie, but with a better orchestra." – *Computer and Video Games* (December 1991)

Insider Insight:

I have no doubt that the rumors of controllers being smashed against walls over this game are true. However, from the moment I took the controller and began playing *Super Ghouls' N Ghosts* in 1993, I was in heaven, instantly high on rediscovering the absolute thrill I had once found in the '80s arcade versions of *Ghosts 'n Goblins* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts*—two long-vanished arcade games I thought I would never play again.

Of course, the SNES version felt and played different than its arcade cousin, but the difference was delightfully staggering, in that the sensation of being more in tune with the game via controller, and being able to fire, retreat, and re-position more quickly, made an exceedingly challenging game all that more enjoyable. Not easier. Just more comfortable. Even so, this game is still a beast to master, if indeed you ever can.

This challenging game proved to be one of the more difficult in the *Ghost n' Goblins* series, simply because there is a lot going on with it and a lot less time to react. More jumping and double-jumping and more moving obstacles. More exact timing required to trigger life-saving advantages, like platforms and weapon and armor upgrades. It is a brutal, unforgiving game, one that will exhaust and frustrate you to no end. But if you relax, take your shots, and learn from them, you will eventually succumb to convincing yourself that you are actually enjoying this ride through absolute Hell on Earth.

As in the previous storylines, you are the Knight Arthur, fighting your way through graveyards, mountains, and the fiery depths of Hell while constantly being assaulted and chased by devils, bats, and zombies. Your mission is to save the Princess who has been captured by Satan and imprisoned in his castle. You start with armor, but just like in the other games in the series, a single hit from an enemy's projectile will strip you down to your underwear, giving you zero protection until you find a power-up. These are found in various treasure chests as you progress through beautifully rendered scenes that were considered artistically complex at the time, but are set to music that was intentionally atonally composed to produce feelings of emotional agitation in the player.

I suspect that the "smashed controller rumors" of the '90s on *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* grew from the mental exertions of players failing the first three levels multiple times for weeks on end until they learned how to use and maintain their shields properly. I know I blew mental gaskets over this game on more than one occasion myself, throwing the controller down in disgust and feeling like a total loser. I think I even cried one time.

But *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* wasn't designed to be a relaxing, feel-good game like *Zelda* or *Mario*. It was designed to mess with you. For a lot of people who cut their gaming teeth on challenging arcade space shooters and quarter eaters in the '80s, like *Defender* and *Zaxxon*, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (as well as every other title in the series) appealed to players who hungered for a more aggressive application in gameplay, not maze-like repetition that was less difficult to master over time and often felt more like a task than an adventure.

Keeping true to the original *Ghosts 'n Goblins* and *Ghouls 'n Ghosts* arcade versions, *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* provided consistent and challenging gameplay for those who enjoyed the unending thrill of escalating challenges and near-impossible wins. That a considerable amount of early '90s players who, like me, were immersed in MSDOS first-person shooters like *Heretic* and *Wolfenstein* (and later *DOOM*) naturally gravitated to *Super Ghouls 'N Ghosts* as a side game—on a platform most of us initially rejected at first—is a testament to the game's ability to successfully deliver the exact kind of action we were looking for.

For a lot of us, going through Hell never felt so good. – Catherine DeSpira

Super Goal! 2

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Tose.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

A port of *Goal! Two* for the NES, *Super Goal! 2* features a ¾ overhead view, with the screen scrolling vertically. Gamers can play against one another or team up against the computer. There are twenty-four teams from which to choose, each represented on the menu screen by the country's flag. There are teams from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and South America. Each squad is rated in four categories, including speed and defensive skill, with some teams much stronger than others. Fouls, back passes, and offsides can be turned on or off. After a coin toss players select from a variety of formations.

The players are nicely drawn and animated, and can perform headers, steals, checks, sliding tackles, bicycle kicks, corner kicks, throw-ins, penalty kicks, and more. Different stadiums, rules, and soccer balls provide variety, as do three modes of play: Super Cup, Exhibition, and PK Mode (PK is short for penalty kick). In Japan, the game was published as *Takeda Nobuhiro no Super Cup Soccer*, but North American releases removed the references to soccer superstar Takeda Nobuhiro.

Notable Quotable:

"This isn't the best SNES soccer game, but it's one of the easiest to learn. *Goal!* fans will be pleased with the improvements." – *Game Players* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Although there are better soccer games out there, this scores good marks in the area of play options, number of teams to choose from, lots of formations, and fairly good play control. The only thing I would have liked to have seen was bigger players on the field. When the Mode 7 effects kick in, it's easy to lose your sense of where your player is. Not a bad game!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Looks and plays like a World Cup contender. This game has it all—tons of options, colorful graphics, and good control. It's a winner across the board . . . the most effective headers and bicycle kicks of any of the SNES games. The only complaint about the controls is the confusion that results when you switch defenders. Sometimes you don't get the player you want to control, but this is only a minor flaw . . . The graphics for *Super Goal! 2* are, in a word, super! The colors show up well on the screen, and the players are detailed. Their movements, especially when executing aerial jumps or headers, are definitely cool to watch. In contrast, the sound is merely okay. Like most soccer games, this one features one of those mind-numbing soundtracks that become annoying after a while." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Super Godzilla

Publisher: Toho.
Developer: Advance Communication Company.
Game Type: Fighting/ Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

An ambitious effort, *Super Godzilla* is a good-looking, dramatic-sounding game that succeeds at being different, yet unfortunately is not much fun. The screen is divided into an upper half, which is where close-up animations are displayed; and a lower half, which is a series of maps that players must slowly (and boringly) navigate to pick up energy, defense boosters, and other items. Godzilla can crush buildings and mountains, but it uses up energy. If he tries to pass through a high-voltage electricity belt he gets damaged, loses energy, and is bounced back. Godzilla also maneuvers across plains and through water, and he must deal with land mines, tanks, missiles, and UFOs.

After locating an enemy on the map, such as Battra, King Ghidorah, or Mechagodzilla, Godzilla will fight the creature in a slow, clunky, awkwardly executed battle to the finish. Godzilla punches, tail-whips, body-strikes, and breathes fire, but the inclusion of a convoluted Fighting Spirit system, where a meter rises and drops depending on your actions (moving forward raises his spirit, standing still or retreating drops it), means you must execute certain attacks at the right time for them to connect. During fights, the lower half of the screen shows the energy level and attack meter for both creatures.

The game features six stages: Osaka Attack Command; The Base of Mt. Fuji Godzilla vs. Mechagodzilla; Hakone, Lake Ashino, Plan to Rescue the Professor; Yokohama on Fire; Decisive Tokyo Battle (first half); and Decisive Tokyo Battle (second half). At various points in the adventure, four characters will offer help via text announcements and the like: Commander (the leader of the Anti-Monster Defense Forces), Professor Ogata, Soldier Taniguchi, and Miss Yano.

In addition to its uniqueness, *Super Godzilla* is notable for one thing: the introduction of a new character, Bagan, who appears in the final fight and uses such attacks as fire breath and laser light. Grand in scope, cinematic in presentation, and ambitious in concept, the game delivers the bells and whistles, but drops the ball when it comes to entertaining gameplay. The title character also appeared in such games as *Godzilla: Monster of Monsters* and *Godzilla 2: War of the Monsters* for the NES and *Godzilla: Unleased* for the PS2 and GameCube.

Memories: When I was a kid during the '70s, I glued together and painted tons of model kits—mostly cars and trucks. The two exceptions to this were Luke Skywalker's X-Wing fighter, which I built by myself, and a glow-in-the-dark Godzilla, which was a team effort by me and my brother. We were huge Godzilla fans and rooted for him like crazy when we watched *King Kong vs. Godzilla* (1962, 1963 in the US).

Notable Quotable:
"I like the whole Godzilla thing, but this game seemed to move a bit slow. The walking scenes seemed redundant. Also, the fighting scenes with the boss really lacked the technique that I've come to enjoy in fighting carts. However, the graphics and sounds are done rather well, and if you're patient, you might be able to get into this game. I just long for more destructive control over Godzilla." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"This game has the most alarmingly weird battle system you'll ever come across . . . the goal is to punch your enemy and then move backwards or forwards to build up fighting spirit. Then a slot machine-like window will appear for you to choose a move . . . it takes

a little bit of time to get used to. Once you do, it's not as bizarre as it seems. It kind of works like a turn-based RPG battle system . . . I actually kind of like this." – SNESMan16 (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"This strategy game lumbers along with minimal action . . . The visuals and sounds, like the brassy music and famous Godzilla roar, capture the essence of the Godzilla movies. Unfortunately, the big guy moves super slowly. You mainly view a boring map screen, where unresponsive directional controls make simple movements a thumb-burning adventure. When you finally battle, minimal button presses fire up good-looking but static cinematic attacks." – *GamePro* (November 1994)

Insider Insight:

Taking control of Godzilla was a dream sought after by many by the time the Super Nintendo caught traction in America. The green goliath was all over television, and even in comic books. I distinctly remember catching most of the Godzilla films on the Sci-Fi Channel (now Syfy) and recording each one onto a VHS tape. It is no surprise that upon first seeing the box art of *Super Godzilla*, I was convinced that it was the coolest game ever. Also on that shelf was *Super Mario RPG*, which in hindsight is the game I should have asked my parents for.

As an elementary student and Nintendo fanatic, I plugged in *Super Godzilla* with the highest of expectations, only to come away confused and frustrated. The game plays in two different modes: one where Godzilla is controlled in a simplistic map, while the top side of the screen shows Godzilla trampling things; and one that looks like a traditional fighting game. Controlling Godzilla in these monster-to-monster battles does not make a lot of sense, as there is really only one punch that can lead to a chance of a special attack. It makes for a disjointed, almost uncontrollable battle system.

Even though I hated *Super Godzilla* as a child, I learned to play the game since my parents paid $50 for it. I got as far as the third stage, but ended up giving the cart to a friend a few years later. If anything, the visuals and soundtrack capture the feel of Godzilla, but the gameplay does not come close. – Alex McCumbers

Super High Impact

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Based on Midway's 1991 coin-op semi-classic, *Super High Impact* is indeed an arcade-style football game, as emphasized by the following: button-mashing brawls (yes, the players on the field get in to fights); amusing voice effects (exclaiming "Oh, my knee!" and the like); humorous animations (including celebrations, frustrations, and flying helmets); and bone-crunching tackles (an announcer rates tackles from "granny" to "awesome" on a Hit-O-Meter).

Super High Impact lacks such staples as substitutions, statistics, a custom playbook, and seasonal play, but there are grass and turf fields, three difficulty levels, adjustable quarter lengths, and three modes of play: Player 1 vs. Computer, Player 1 vs. Player 2, and Player 1+2 vs. Computer. There are eighteen fictional teams, and you can choose from thirty plays (fifteen on offense and fifteen on defense). Plus, you can call time out.

When the quarterback drops back to pass the computer picks the open receiver, and the power of kicks is determined by tapping a button rapidly— further evidence of the simple, arcade-like action, which scrolls horizontally. While not in league with *Madden* or *Tecmo Bowl*, *Super High Impact* is good for a few laughs, especially in two-player mode. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

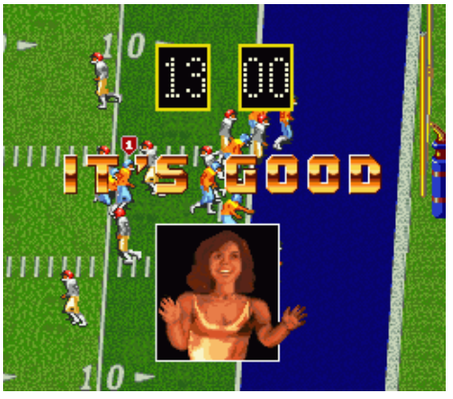
"Football purists will shun this action-oriented contest, but its pigskin pandemonium is a grabber for those who put intense, violent action ahead of the strategic nuances of the 100-yard fight . . . large and well-animated players . . . The audio is great . . . The grunts and groans mix with well-digitized speech to provide the right atmosphere for all the mayhem . . . Passing is much less difficult than in most football cartridges . . . What *Super High Impact* lacks in pigskin authenticity, it makes up for with bruising action and wild audiovisuals." – *Electronic Games* (July 1993)

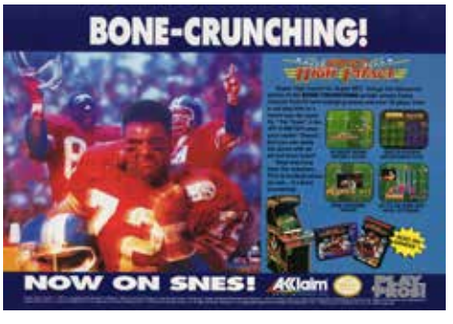
Notable Quotable:

"I can't imagine someone deriving years or even months of enjoyment from this game . . . it's basically a low-rent *Tecmo Bowl* (handful of plays, rudimentary controls, favors high-scoring games) that's been injected with pure, unadulterated, 93.5 octane ATTITUDE! Big touchdown celebrations! Lots of smack talk! Fights! LOTS AND LOTS OF YELLING! Sounds cheesy as all hell today, and make no mistake, it is, but if you cut it a bit of slack and remember it came out 20 years ago, you can at least giggle at its campiness." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Notable Quotable:

"After each tackle, the screen will shake violently, helmets or pads will fly off, players will beat their chests in triumph or even kick a player when he's down . . . The best part of the game is the speech, which includes some very funny commentary and sound effects . . . While the game delivers in the trash-talking department, the biggest problem is the player animation: everyone moves stiffly and in an upright position. The game is also slower than you would expect given the outrageous action and 'high impact' title . . . The computer opponent must have graduated from the same school of erratic defense as *Tecmo Super Bowl*, which is to say you shouldn't expect a lot of resistance." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)





Super James Pond

Publisher: American Softworks Corporation.
Developer: Millennium Interactive/Victordean.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

In *Super James Pond*, the fishy title character you control (a "robocod") dons a special Robosuit, meaning he spends most of his time in the game out of the water. Pond runs through nine colorful, maze-like North Pole toy factories, jumping on platforms, on top of enemies (including caterpillars, gingerbread men, cars with teeth, flying playing cards, and wind-up dolls), and over spike-filled pits. There are multiple exits and secret areas to explore.

In most levels, Pond must locate and deactivate penguin bombs set by Dr. Maybe and battle an oversized boss at the end. Like Mario, Pond can bump certain platforms to make items appear (such as enemies or vehicles in this case). Far less conventional is a fun-to-use stretching/extending maneuver that lets Pond grab onto ledges, bypass spike pits, access new areas, and reach high platforms and otherwise unattainable bonus items. To help with his mission Pond can don wings, grab an umbrella (for floating), and commandeer a car, an airplane, and even a bathtub. There are also underwater areas where he must swim.

As hinted by the North Pole reference, the game has a Christmas theme, punctuated by digital renditions of such tunes as "Jingle Bells" and "We Wish You a Merry Christmas." Adding to the enjoyment and whimsy are cute platforms, including Legos, toothbrushes, musical notes, and bars of soap.

Also released for the Game Boy, *Super James Pond* is a port of *James Pond 2—Codename: RoboCod* for home computers and *James Pond II—Codename: RoboCod* for the Genesis, both of which hit stores in 1991. Released the same year as *James Pond II—Codename: RoboCod* for the Game Gear. Followed by a remake called *James Pond: Codename RoboCod* (Game Boy Advance, Nintendo DS, PlayStation 2).

Notable Quotable:

"James's ability to make himself tall is quite interesting, but that is really the only special thing about him. Fans of *JP* may be better off with his *Aquatic Games*." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

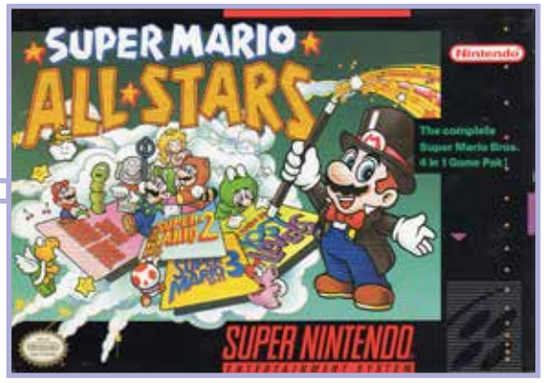
"It was the era of cutesy gaming mascots, and I wanted to make my own. Nobody had done a fish, and I figured I could make a fun character and he'd have an interesting world to play in. In the early months of working on *RoboCod*, I had just discovered 16-bit consoles. I instantly fell in love with [*Super Mario World*] and, yes, I wanted to try and capture some console goodness on the Amiga. It was definitely a case of making the kind of game I wanted to play." – *James Pond* series creator Chris Sorrell (www.boxedpixels.co.uk), discussing the genesis of the franchise on the Commodore Amiga

Notable Quotable:

"I have to applaud a game eager to keep inventing bizarre twists on traditional themes, mixing them together with little regard for the platform genre rule book. There're plenty of secrets tucked away on each of the sometimes too-enormous levels. Cheap deaths aside, there's much fun to be had exploring the majority of the game, especially when you never know what kind of ridiculous enemy might come at you next . . . Compared to the Amiga version I remember so fondly, this SNES conversion still plays well, but there's a huge amount of framerate concerns. Some levels (such as those under water and those with flying sections) are pretty much constantly plagued with fairly serious slowdown . . . Another quirk of the SNES version is the strange fact that all the upside-down stages have now been flipped so that they're now the right way up." – Julian Hill (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

Super Mario All-Stars

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



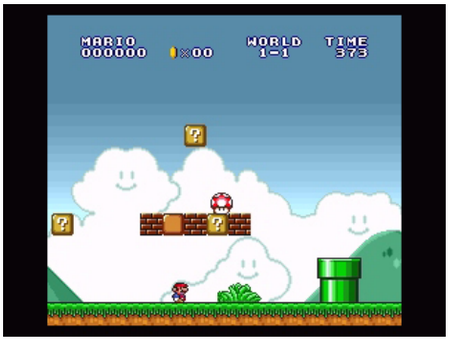
Called *Super Mario Collection* in Japan, *Super Mario All-Stars*—which for a while was offered as a free mail-in cartridge with the purchase of an SNES console—is an enhanced compilation of three best-selling NES games on one 16-megabit cartridge: *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 2*, and *Super Mario Bros. 3*. Each title features updated backgrounds, character art, and music, with the added benefit of battery-backed memory for saving progress. The gameplay and level designs are otherwise virtually identical to the 8-bit originals.

In *Super Mario Bros.*, players guide the famous Italian plumber (or his brother Luigi) through eight surprise-filled worlds of the fabled Mushroom Kingdom, jumping on such quirky characters as Koopa Troopas (turtles), Little Goombas (mushrooms), and the Hammer Brothers (twin turtles) while avoiding Buzzy Beetles, Piranha Plants, bottomless pits, and more. Fire flowers, Starman, and magic mushroom power-ups enable Mario to become Fiery Mario (who shoots fireballs), Invincible Mario, or Super Mario (who can shatter bricks by hitting them from below). The goal is to rescue the Mushroom princess from the evil Bowser. Expansive levels, collectable coins (100 grants an extra life), excellent controls, hidden areas, cartoonish graphics and sounds, and other attributes make *Super Mario Bros.* one of the most beloved games of all time.

The US sequel to *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 2* is essentially the same game as *Yume Kōjō: Doki Doki Panic* for the Famicom (the Japanese NES), but the Arabian hero has been dropped in favor of Mario characters. Players guide Mario, Luigi, Toad, and/or Princess Toadstool through seven vast worlds, battling such oddball creatures as Tweeters, Snitfits, Ninjis, Beezos, and Phantos. Instead of jumping on enemies like in the original *Super Mario Bros.*, the primary method of dispatching enemies is to pick up (or pull up) items—including the enemies themselves—and throw them. Other differences include creating doorways to sub-spaces; keys for opening doors; a slot machine bonus game for winning extra lives; and mushroom blocks that players can pick up, move, and stand on. Although not as beloved among the general public as its predecessor, *SMB2* is a fun, challenging, puzzle-filled game.

A favorite among countless gamers, *Super Mario Bros. 3* is often called one of the greatest video games of all time. Basic gameplay is similar to the original *Super Mario Bros.*, but lots of new features were added, including a world map screen; a sliding attack; mini-games (including a memory match card game); an inventory system for power-ups; and various fun-to-wear suits that enable Mario to turn into Raccoon Mario (fly, tail attack), Frog Mario (swim faster), or Tanooki Mario (fly, turn into a statue). Also included in *Super Mario Bros. 3* is Battle Mode, which is a special version of *Mario Bros.*, the 1983 arcade classic.

Super Mario All-Stars is also notable for including *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels*, a sequel to the original *Super Mario Bros.* that was previously unreleased in the United States, as it was deemed too difficult for American gamers. *The Lost Levels*, known as *Super Mario Bros. 2* in Japan, has the same type of



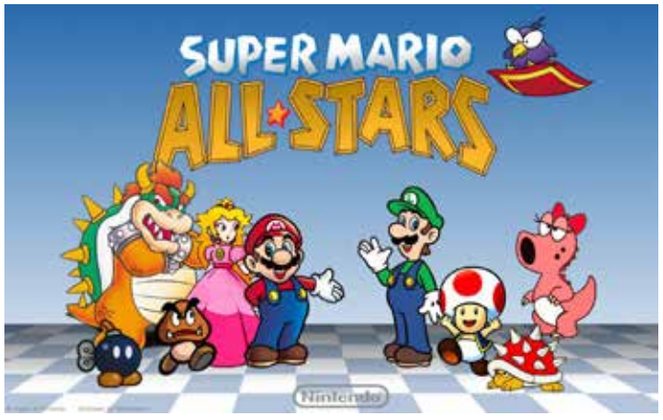
gameplay as its groundbreaking predecessor, but with new, more challenging layouts, new enemies (such as Flying Bloopers), and poisonous mushrooms that shrink or kill Mario. In 2010, *Super Mario All-Stars* was brought to the Wii as *Super Mario All-Stars 25th Anniversary Edition* to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of *Super Mario Bros.*

Notable Quotable:

"Combining and updating all the Mario games for the Super NES is an excellent idea, and the revamped versions feature all aspects of the NES originals which earned them their classic status. Graphically and sonically, *Mario All-Stars* is excellent, with loads of detail added to the backdrops and equal care given to the updating of the music." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Even though I own multiple more recent titles on the Wii, DS, and 3DS, it's easy to come back to *Super Mario All-Stars* from time to time. The original game might be a relic, and *The Lost Levels* more a curiosity than legitimate entertainment, but I still get a lot of enjoyment from *2* and *3*. The former featured a sort of dreamlike creativity that routinely popped up in future games, such as the SNES' *Yoshi's Island*. The latter simply established itself as the mark of excellence to which all future offerings would be compared. With those two games readily available on the NES and elsewhere, this compilation isn't essential, but it's still a very enjoyable one that I've had a lot of fun with over the past 20-some years." – *Honest Gamers* (www.honestgamers.com)



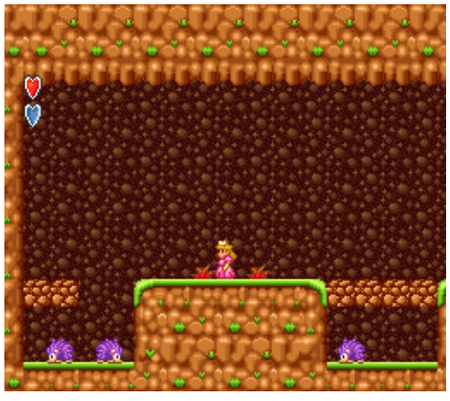
Insider Insight:

If I were to ask a gamer to name some gaming genres they might mention shooters, beat-'em-ups, platformers, survival horror, racing, and sports, just to name a few. If you were to ask 2005 nine-year-old me to name some genres, I might have told you Mario, Star Wars, Mario, Galaga, Mario, Mario, and Mario.

Yes, growing up (and still to this day) the Mario series was as influential to me as it was to anyone else. It was simple, it was colorful, it was challenging, and most importantly, it was fun. And while the Mario games I typically played were a little more modern (*Sunshine* and *Galaxy* being the primary examples), I definitely spent a good chunk of time on some of the classics. *Super Mario Bros.*, as well as its two sequels, were arguably the foundation of my experiences as a gamer.

These were not being played on the NES. While we certainly owned the games for that system, I found myself drawn to *Super Mario All-Stars*. Easily my most played cartridge for the Super Nintendo, I loved everything about it. The flawless controls, cool graphics, and revamped, funky music enthralled me, but there was one aspect in particular that had me especially intrigued at a young age: I could save my progress. For a kid who did not grow up in the Atari age, saving my progress on anything was pretty much expected. Thanks to that feature on *All-Stars*, I could play World 8 over and over until I finally mastered it. To a nine-year-old Millennial, this was much less aggravating than having to play it on the NES!

Today I can play through *Super Mario Bros.* with little issue, but I will always look back on *Super Mario All-Stars* as that nice buffer that helped me keep my sanity. – Ryan Weiss



Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World

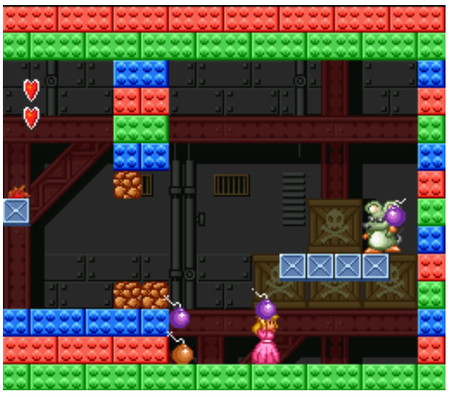
Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

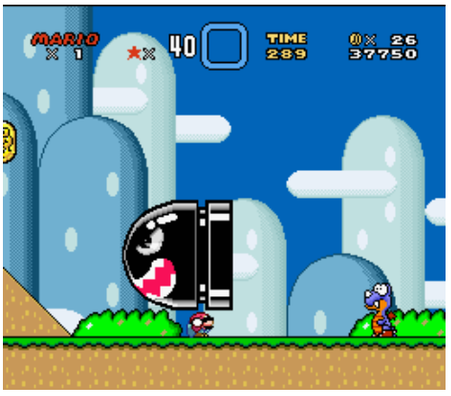
About a year after Nintendo released *Super Mario All-Stars*—a 16-bit updated compilation of *Super Mario Bros.*, *Super Mario Bros. 2*, *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels*—they upped the ante by tacking on the expansive and excellent *Super Mario World* in all its original glory. About the only change to *Super Mario World* was an updating of Luigi's look to his then-current design, as opposed to a mere palette swap of Mario.

Produced in 1994 as the new pack-in title with the Super NES console, this five-in-one cartridge contains nineteen save slots: four for each *Super Mario All-Stars* game and three for *Super Mario World*. *Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World* is easily one of the best value packages in the history of gaming, and it is a fascinating look back at some of the most important, most enjoyable, and most expertly crafted games ever produced.

Notable Quotable:

"The combined importance of these five games, as judged against the entire history of video games, simply cannot be overestimated. With the possible exceptions of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* and *Rayman*, this cartridge as a package represents the absolute pinnacle of the 2D platform genre . . . Stunning how well every game has withstood the rigors of age . . . Uniform, cartoon-like graphics all the way through . . . I typically avoid the use of superlatives, but this must be said: if you buy only one game for your Super NES, this is, by far and away, the one. These are games that have proven their widespread appeal, and their relevance to the industry has only grown stronger." – Christian Huey (formerly at allgame.com)





Insider Insight:

Super Mario All-Stars absolutely blew my mind when I first played it. Like many of you, I was a massive Mario fan. I played *Super Mario Bros. 2* so much that I could beat the game in twenty-five minutes! (I was really proud of myself until I discovered speed runs on YouTube where people were destroying the game in less than ten minutes.)

I got *Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World* soon after it came out. I was excited because I had missed both individual releases—at the time I was in a Sega Genesis phase. When I played it for the first time I thought I would get right into *Super Mario World*, but then I quickly discovered *Super Mario Bros.: The Lost Levels*!

What on earth was this game I had never seen before? A totally different Mario game! It was like the original *Super Mario Bros.*, but with new levels and other different stuff? It was only August, but I felt like the holidays had come early. My social life went out the window and I played the game constantly for a month straight. I didn't even care to check out the updated graphics of the other three NES Mario games or even try *Super Mario World*—I was all about *Lost Levels*. I did not beat the game until much later, but boy did I have a ton of fun playing it.

I did eventually get around to playing the other games. I remember being impressed with the 16-bit graphical upgrades for the *Super Mario Bros.* trilogy and thinking how robust *Super Mario World* was. In fact, this release featured some of the games I loved the most as a kid and served as my number-one-go-to collection until *Super Mario Maker* for the Wii U released in 2015. Good times! – Arda Ocal

Super Mario Kart

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Go-Kart Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

One of the most influential video games in the history of the industry, *Super Mario Kart* no less than invented the go-kart racing genre. Viewing the action from behind the car, players cruise one of eight classic Nintendo characters—Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Yoshi, Bowser, Donkey Kong Jr., Koopa Troopa, and Toad—around fifteen different courses (which flow smoothly via Mode 7 effects), including Mario Circuit (a paved track with good traction); Donut Plains (pipes and gophers get in the way); Ghost Valley (a track made of wood—keep an eye out for holes); Bowser Castle (a course made of stones set on a bed of lava); Choco Island (a dirt course in the desert—beware of Piranha Plant); Koopa Beach (a race around a small island); and Vanilla Lake (a frozen lake with pipes and holes in the ice). The level of road slipperiness differs for each course.

Gamers use a variety of power-ups, including invincibility, speed boosts, and higher jumps, to gain the competitive advantage against seven other cars as they race around the twisting, turning tracks. Most enjoyably, players can throw shells at other cars and shrink them with lightning bolts. The two-player split screen action, which includes Mario Kart GP (race against the other cars), Match Race (one-on-one to the finish line), and Battle Mode (burst your opponent's balloons in an arena), is essential gaming for any SNES owner. Regardless of the mode, the controls are excellent, letting gamers accelerate, put on the brakes, hop, do power slides (a key strategy for winning races), use items, and switch to and from the rear-view mirror.

Super Mario Kart was followed by *Mario Kart 64* (N64), *Mario Kart: Super Circuit* (GBA), *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* (GC, a favorite among fans of the series), *Mario Kart Arcade GP* (arcade, includes *Pac-Man* characters), *Mario Kart DS* (DS), *Mario Kart Arcade GP 2* (arcade), *Mario Kart Wii* (Wii), *Mario Kart 7* (3DS), *Mario Kart 8* (Wii U), and *Mario Kart 8 Deluxe* (Switch). Numerous clones also followed, including such quality titles as *Diddy Kong Racing* (N64) and *Crash Team Racing* (PS1).

Fun Fact: *Super Mario Kart* is the third-best-selling SNES game of all time (after *Super Mario World* and *Donkey Kong Country*), with nearly nine million copies sold.

Notable Quotable:

"This racer with a focus on fun spawned more crummy imitators than Elvis, but you can't blame *Mario Kart*. It's only natural for companies to try to capitalize on one of the best multiplayer games ever. All your favorites from the Mario universe are here, racing for place and battling for bragging rights. SNES' Mode 7 scaling revolutionized the way racing games looked, and *Kart*'s weapons added a new dimension to play. Not even the 64-bit update can compete with this originator." – *Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Super Mario Kart* the thirty-fifth greatest video game of all time

Notable Quotable:

"We didn't at all have the concept of a racing game with Mario . . . Miyamoto assigned us the task of making *F-Zero* for two players . . . In *F-Zero*, you race at over 400 kilometers per hour along incredibly long straight lines, but we realized that splitting the screen into upper and lower portions for two players to do the same thing was out of the question . . . Instead of tracks with long straight lines, the track designs are compact, with lots of twists and turns so they fit well within a square . . . Early on, we had young men in overalls driving the karts . . . Back when the guys in overalls were still driving, they could throw oil cans. Then oil would spread and the karts would slide. Oil cans seemed appropriate for guys in overalls . . . Mario wears overalls because they're good for pixel animation, and I think that line of thought led us to choose Donkey Kong Jr., too." – *Super Mario Kart* co-director Hideki Konno (www.nintendo.com)

Super Mario Kart

Insider Insight:
Super Mario Kart is very near and dear to my heart, and I have very fond memories playing the game after school while I was in junior high. My school at the time had an area in the cafeteria where they had various games set up for kids to play at the end of the day, and I was always glued to *Super Mario Kart*. I was blown away by the use of Mode 7 graphics and the fun racing action. My personal favorite characters to play as were, and still are, Toad and Koopa Troopa.

Super Mario Kart was so much different than any other games I had played up until then. Sure, *F-Zero* is an awesome racer as well, and also made great use of the Mode 7 for the SNES, but what really set *Super Mario Kart* apart was the Battle Mode. This mode brought out the competitive spirit in me, and to have the game themed around one of my all-time favorite gaming franchises in Mario was definitely a huge plus. – John Lester

Insider Insight:
To remain intellectually honest, I feel compelled to disclose my undying hatred for *Super Mario Kart*. That aside, I will admit some of my fondest memories of gaming circle around this electronic form of frustration. In my household, *Super Mario Kart*'s Battle Mode became the official game of Thanksgiving, and still is to present day. It is not uncommon to see score screens of 200–300 wins on each side by the end of our full-day marathon.

I remain unsure why I submit myself to this particular form of torture year after year—I am terrible at *Super Mario Kart*, so perhaps it is the camaraderie of it all, or perhaps the enjoyment I get from winning a single match after twenty tries of being hammered by red shells or tagged by the perfectly timed green shell (who gets hit by green shells!? Apparently I do). I should also point out there is only one *Mario Kart* (*Mario Kart 64*, *Double Dash*), and the other "Kart" titles just don't hold water to the original. Call me a purist. – Dain Anderson

Insider Insight:
Although I always had a fondness for racing games, I went nuts for racing games that offered unique experiences. Prior to the release of *Super Mario Kart* there really wasn't anything else quite like it. The Mode 7 graphics were perfect for the type of track rotation and image scaling that a racing game demands, and the depth and strategy provided through the in-game power-ups made me eager to play through the wide variety of tracks and three difficulty levels. It really says something that the basic kart racing formula this game pioneered is still being repeated today.

Perhaps the greatest feature of this game was that not only did it offer a robust single-player experience, but also a seamless two-player experience. Because of the fun characters and variety of gameplay options, this was the type of game that appealed to the kind of person who was not normally into racing games, like my girlfriend at the time. We had a blast playing countless hours of competitive race and battle modes. When a competitive game can be inclusive like that, you know it is something special. By taking a game concept that would have struggled to fit properly into 8-bit confines, I felt this truly demonstrated the potential of next-generation 16-bit gaming. – Bill Loguidice

Insider Insight:
Super Mario Kart is a very special game for me that I hold dearly in my heart, and not only because it is the best in the series. My parents never were big fans of video games. It didn't stop my father—who was very curious and liked technology a lot—from offering my mother the Game Boy as a Christmas gift in 1991. Needless to say that I was the one playing it—a lot! Nevertheless, having a home console was a whole different story, and was simply out of the question for a long time until 1995. Indeed, after visiting the family for the holidays, we celebrated our own belated Christmas. This is how, on January 1, 1995, I got my first home console—a Super Nintendo. I was happy beyond belief and am still grateful to my parents for giving me this unexpected present.

Later that year, while I was at a train station in Paris with my parents, my father wanted to buy me a new game (I was a very spoiled child), and I remember seeing this blue box with Mario in a kart and other characters I recognized from the magazines I was reading when I was not playing. It turned out to be *Super Mario Kart*, one of the funniest, most entertaining games I have ever played. Yoshi is my favorite racer, and I used to play this one-of-a-kind (at least at the time) entry in the Mario series with my sister, mother, and father.

Friends and extended family came over to our home to play as well, and we always had so much fun. Battle Mode was and still is my favorite, even though there aren't many courses (only four). I remember being blown away by the Mode 7 used while racing. Speed sensations were very convincing! I also spent countless hours reading the thick manual (even after it fell in the water), which explained a lot on the background of the game with very funny pictures of the characters.

Sadly, a few months after I got the game my father passed away, making it the last game he ever bought and played with me. I still own this very copy of the game and the manual—I threw away the box for some reason. – Antoine Clerc-Renaud

Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Square.
Game Type: Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

Bowser has once again made off with Princess Toadstool and taken her to his castle. Upon hearing the princess' scream, Mario took off for Bower's Keep and soundly defeated Bowser. After the fight a giant sword mysteriously crashed into the castle, forcing Mario and Bowser to join forces to bring peace to the land. You guide Mario, as well as tagalongs Bowser, Geno, and Mallow, through the Mushroom Kingdom. Depending on the character, you have various weapons and attacks at your disposal, including sticks, cymbals, hammers, punches, fire attacks, blasts, and beams.

Battles are fought in turn-based fashion using four battle techniques. There are timed hits, which let you hit an enemy more than once; continuous hits, which cause more damage; star hits, which are special attacks that let you hold any button until three stars appear; and rotational hits, which require a rotational movement on the control pad. After you defeat an enemy you may receive a bonus flower, which will provide you with a free turn, extra offensive power, or extra defensive power.

Throughout your journey you can pick up such items as Able Juice to recover normal conditions; mushrooms to recover hit points; water to destroy ghosts; and Yoshi Cookies that bring forth enemy-swallowing Yoshis. You can also buy and sell various items at tool shops, recover hit points by spending the night in an inn, and communicate with Frogfucius for advice. You will encounter platforms, floating panels, spinning flowers, trampolines, pipes, donut blocks, and other devices in a nod to Mario's previous side-scrolling adventures.

From time to time you will enter mini-games, such as Melody Bay, which has you jumping on a tadpole to make a melody; Moleville Mountain, which is a mining car race; and Beetle Race, which has you collecting as many beetles as you can by jumping on them. *Super Mario RPG*, which features fully rendered characters and a ¾ overhead view, was the spiritual precursor to *Paper Mario* for the N64.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Mario RPG* is a game for the whole family . . . The adventure has plenty of size and complexity for the seasoned RPG pro, and for the action player, there is a real hands-on, interactive feel. Just as we all knew it would be, this game is everything Nintendo promised." – *Game Players* (May 1996)

Notable Quotable:

"In many ways, *Super Mario RPG* is for the beginner because it offers simple control and employs many platform game experiences that most gamers are familiar with. Even with its simplicity, this game offers the most hardcore RPG players a fantastic experience that includes a humorous story and many secrets to uncover." – *Game Informer* (July 2000)

Notable Quotable:

"I can honestly say that I did not plan on seeing a new Mario game until the Nintendo 64 was unveiled. The characters seem too childish for older gamers, but the long adventure itself—that involves actual gameplay and a good storyline—will keep many gamers interested . . . The combat engine is similar to many other RPGs and is easy to use. Nintendo put the Super NES sound processor to work in *Mario RPG*, providing the gamer with great sound effects and music." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1996)

Insider Insight:
I was a latecomer to the SNES. What can I say? When the machine was introduced, I was working sixteen to eighteen hour days at a TV station, after which I went home and went to sleep. I was not playing, or watching, or listening to much of anything at the time. How late did I discover the SNES? True fact: it was when I installed an SNES emulator on a jailbroken Wii. (Hey, at least I was keeping it in the Nintendo family.) I thought my Mario-fixated son, then about five years old, might like to expand his horizons. He tore through *Super Mario World*, and one New Years' Eve, I thought we would try a title with which I had no familiarity with whatsoever: *Super Mario RPG*.

The music and graphics were mesmerizing—even all these years later—but the depth of the gameplay kept us riveted. Riveted enough that we tag-teamed the game all night, and into the next year. Sadly, some of the concepts—enemies that literally eat you?—bothered my little one with his vivid imagination, so instead of going to bed by himself, he huddled up in a blanket and snuggled next to me on the couch while I kept playing a bit longer.

And that is where his mother found us in the morning, both snuggled up, dead to the world, finally lulled to sleep by the game's mesmerizing music. I got an earful about proper healthy bedtimes and spending too much time playing video games. It wasn't my fault that she failed to see the awe and wonder of father and son fighting their way through the corrupted Mushroom Kingdom. To this day, neither my son nor myself finds much fun in playing *Super Mario RPG* alone. – Earl Green

Super Mario World

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1991.

Taking place in the aftermath of *Super Mario Bros. 3* for the NES, *Super Mario World* finds Mario and Luigi vacationing in Dinosaur Land after saving Mushroom Kingdom from Bowser and the rest of the Koopas. Unfortunately, while the brothers are napping on the beach, Bowser and company kidnap Princess Toadstool, and the duo must rescue her once again. They are joined by lovable Yoshi, a friendly (and now iconic) dinosaur who they find hatching out of an egg. Not only is Yoshi—who makes his first appearance in this game—eager to help, but he gives Mario a cape containing magical powers.

Super Mario World features the same type of run-and-jump gameplay established by *Super Mario Bros.* and brought to perfection by *Super Mario Bros. 3*, but it adds a number of new features, including an overworld map and the aforementioned Yoshi. At various points in the game Mario can jump on Yoshi and ride him like a horse. In addition to acting as a hit point, Yoshi can stick out his long tongue and eat berries (consuming enough gets you an extra life), turtle shells, and enemies. He can spit shells at enemies, and if he eats a red shell he will spit fireballs. If he eats a yellow shell he will create a sand cloud (which is lethal to enemies) when he bounces off the ground.

When donning his magic cape (by grabbing a cape feather and becoming Caped Mario) Mario can fly, and he can use a spinning attack to defeat enemies and hit blocks from the side. Mario also has access to his traditional power-ups: the super mushroom makes him bigger, while the fire flower lets him hurl fireballs at enemies. Mario can also crouch, swim, enter pipes, climb ropes, slide down slopes, stomp on enemies, hit blocks from below to defeat enemies or reveal items, and much more. In two-player mode the second gamer plays as Luigi in alternating fashion.

Enemies are cartoonish as usual and include such characters as Koopas, Goombas, Piranha Plants (some of which jump), Monty Mole (who bursts out of the ground), urchins, Rip Van Fish, Rex (who must be jumped on twice), Bob-ombs, Thwomp guards (stone ghosts who try to crush Mario), Magikoopa (who can turn blocks into enemies), Sumo Brother, and Chargin' Chuck. Some of the Koopas have pop culture referencing names, such as Iggy Koopa, Lemmy Koopa, Morton Koopa Jr., Ludwig Von Koopa, and Wendy O. Koopa.

Throughout the game's ninety-six levels (spread over nine worlds), which include mountains to climb, rivers to cross, and castles, forests, haunted houses, a sunken ship, and subterranean depths to explore, you will encounter helpful items, including super stars (invincibility), 3-up moons (three extra lives), jumping boards (super high jump), Yoshi's wings (Yoshi can fly), and power balloons (drift through the sky). There are also several kinds of blocks you can utilize, including rotating, bonus, switch (turns certain objects into coins and vice versa), message (hints and advice), and grab (for throwing or holding). To unlock certain areas you must transport items, such as grabbing keys and carrying them to keyholes. Battery backup saves four games in progress.

Widely hailed as one of the greatest video games of the era, *Super Mario World* was the original pack-in game with the Super Nintendo console. It is the best-selling SNES game of all time, moving more than 20 million copies. The game has been re-released many times, including in *Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World* for the SNES and in *Super Mario Advance 2* for the Game Boy Advance.

Notable Quotable:

"Monumentally important . . . propelled the SNES to greatness . . . top-notch level design . . . lands right in the sweet spot of what a 2D Mario platformer should be. Plenty of variety, fun power-ups, accessibility . . . packed with little touches that make it more than just a typical Mario Bros. game." – The Game Hoard (thegamehoard.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are absolutely brilliant, with some fantastic visual gags (the look of surprise on a nasty's face when it's grabbed by the dinosaur is hilarious) and the marvelous music (complete with honky-tonk piano samples) really shows what the Super Famicom's PCM sound chip can do. Quite apart from all that, the gameplay is just so addictive you'd better be prepared to stay stuck to your screens until you've completed it! Overall, a totally fantastic game." – *Computer and Video Games* (March 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"Included with the Super NES system, this fourth installment in the Super Mario series (the fifth if you count *Super Mario Land* for the Game Boy system) gives you the feeling that Nintendo is beating a dead Koopa. Mario bops his enemies, eats power mushrooms, crawls in and out of drainpipes . . . all the things he's been doing for the past five years, and in settings not remarkably advanced, graphically, from those of previous eight-bit games. *Super Mario World* amounts to advertising, a vehicle intended to show off the capabilities of the Super NES as well as goad brand-conscious kids into buying the system in the first place." – Bob Strauss (*Entertainment Weekly*, September 27, 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"We no longer had the restrictions on scrolling and the number of colors that the Famicom [Japanese NES] had, so it became much easier to depict things. That was nice. However, before starting *Super Mario World*, we ported

Mario 3 to the Super Famicom [Japanese Super NES] as a hardware experiment, and even though the colors and sprites were more detailed, it was still the same game. It made me realize that we couldn't just make the same game again: we had to create something new. So it was in that context that we talked about how to make the most use of the new hardware . . . *Super Mario Bros. 3* was made for experienced players who had delved deep into the previous Mario games. In contrast, we aimed to make *Super Mario World* friendly to beginners as well, but still exciting for those who played *Super Mario Bros. 3* . . . One of the issues with action games is how to make something that can be enjoyed by all skill levels, from beginners to more advanced players. One way is to add an 'Easy Mode,' but I think the best method is when the player can adjust the difficulty himself while playing. The dotted-line blocks fill that role in *Super Mario World* . . . I've been wanting to make a game that isn't simply about reaching the end of the level—a game where even after you beat the level, you still want to come back again and explore and experience more of. For that, making the levels easier is a pre-requisite." – *Super Mario World* producer Shigeru Miyamoto (*Super Mario World Official Guide Book*)

Insider Insight:
I remember buying into the marketing hype that the Sega Genesis was the system with '90s attitude and the SNES, as exemplified by its pack-in game, *Super Mario World*, was slow and out of touch. From a distance this seemed to be true. That all changed when I finally got a SNES of my own and played this game as part of my amazing *Super Mario All-Stars + Super Mario World* pack-in cartridge. This game wasn't slow and dated, instead representing a master class in game design, with perfectly tuned controls and delightful levels to both challenge and explore. While the graphics were suitably bright, colorful, and detailed, I was really impressed by the sound. Even through a regular TV every song and sound effect resonated. From running through a cavern, with its wonderful echo effect, to riding Yoshi accompanied by bongo drums, the sound design was clearly given as much care and attention as the rest of the game. That attention to detail was what set Nintendo apart at the time and still makes this game hold up brilliantly today. – Bill Loguidice

Insider Insight:
Super Mario World will always have a special place in my heart. My Super Nintendo was a Christmas gift from my mother; my parents were separated and I lived with my father. This was my very first console, and as a bonus it included *Super Mario World*, my very first game. I spent my youth travelling between family members, and I brought my Super Nintendo everywhere with me. I became a master at setting it up and taking it down. There was no TV I couldn't hook it up to; I became the family A/V expert, self-taught.

My parents did not understand video games and thought they wasted my brain away, so *Super Mario World* was my only game for a long time. Thankfully, there was tons of game content packed into that cartridge. There wasn't anything Mario could not do, and I escaped with him. I flew with a feather, I met Yoshi, and I explored haunted houses. Every challenge was thematically appropriate to the world and stage. I loved that game. I played every stage and found every secret level. It was the first game that I beat alone and my first game that I finished to 100% completion. Having that "96" next to my top save slot was my first video game badge of honor. – Juan Vaca

Insider Insight:
It is embarrassing to admit, but I was very much a latecomer to this title. In late 1992, I finally convinced my parents to purchase a Super Nintendo for me as a Christmas gift. At the time the fighting game craze was kicking into high gear, and I had spent much of fall dumping a small mint's worth of quarters into the local *Street Fighter II: Champion Edition* arcade machine. Thus, when it came time to provide the specifics for my SNES, I asked for the basic SNES Control Set and *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*. The rationale for opting for the version of the SNES without the *Super Mario World* pack-in was twofold. First, it was a time when the holiday budget was particularly tight, so a scenario involving two games was not going to pass muster. Second, in my jaded thirteen-year-old gamer's mind, the *Super Mario Bros.* franchise had obviously peaked with *Super Mario Bros. 3*, and the thought of a new adventure in "Dinoland" elicited a roll of the eyes and a quite vocal "Pfft!" My mind was set on besting Bison, not Bowser again.

Flash forward nearly nine years. My father was on the verge of getting remarried, and I had an expanded family as a result. I was now an older brother, and as a self-appointed duty, I felt it only proper to give my new younger brother Dan a thorough education in the classics of the NES and SNES eras. To my surprise, I found out that he had once owned an SNES but had long since traded it in for another console. The only remnant from that collection was his *Super Mario World* cart, which he insisted I try. At first those ghosts of my early teenage years resurfaced, and with them the urge to dismiss it yet again. In an effort to be more open-minded I gave the game a whirl, and almost immediately I wanted to kick myself for my apathy toward it years earlier.

Over the course of the weeks that followed, he and I spent countless hours playing through and uncovering all of the game's multiple level exits and secret areas. To this day, that time period is still one of my fondest with respect to gaming memories. It may have taken me the better part of a decade to catch on, but with the aid of a wise sibling, I eventually saw the brilliant light of the masterpiece that is *Super Mario World*. – Matt Miller

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

The evil Magikoopa Kamek has hatched a plot to kidnap the newborn Mario brothers, and his toadies are dispatched to rob the stork of this precious cargo. They succeed in capturing only Luigi, and baby Mario falls to the ground. There he is found by Yoshi, who sets out on a great adventure to rescue Luigi and return the brothers to their parents.

The twist in *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* is that you control Yoshi for the majority of the game, not Mario. Baby Mario rides on Yoshi's back as you travel through six worlds (each consisting of eight stages) on your way to Kamek's castle. When Yoshi is hit by an enemy Mario falls off and floats in a bubble. You then have a limited amount of time to regain Mario before the toadies capture him and you lose a life. When you grab a Super Star, Mario, whom you control for a short time, will power-up and become an invincible little tyke who can do a whole lot of damage to enemies.

Crafty dinosaur that he is, Yoshi can run and jump, and he can use his lashing tongue to grab enemies. He can then spit the enemy out or swallow it to create an egg, which will grant you a coin, two stars, or a special red coin. Yoshi can find watermelons that will enable him to spit seeds, fire, and ice at enemies. By touching a metamorphosis bubble Yoshi will temporarily become a helicopter, a mole tank, a submarine, a train, or a car.

Throughout the game there are many other items that Yoshi can use to good effect. These include objects that turn all the enemies into clouds or stars, show you where the red coins are in the stage, allow you access to hidden areas, increase the countdown timer, give you clues, and much more. There are also mini battles, such as Popping Balloons and a Watermelon Seed Spitting Contest, and bonus challenges, such as Scratch and Match and The Slot Machine.

Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island utilizes the Super FX2 chip for enhanced graphic effects such as rotation and scaling. Battery backup allows you to save your progress for three different games.

Notable Quotable:

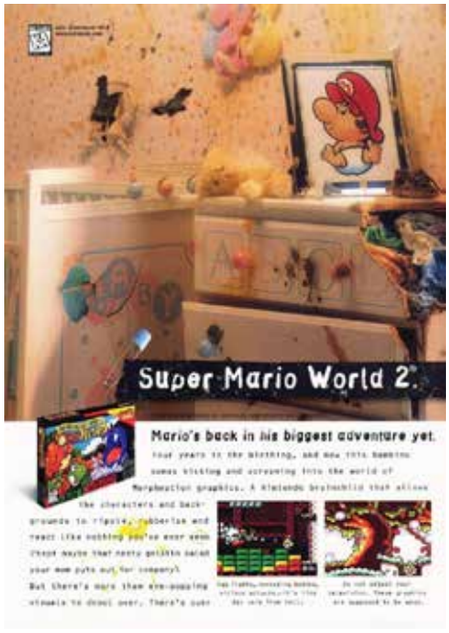
"*Yoshi's Island* doesn't rely on flashy graphics or jazzy effects to cover up an empty game. This is one of the last of a dying breed: a 16-bit game that shows real heart and creativity. Now if they would only do a 16-bit sequel to *Zelda* before the SNES is put to rest." – *GamePro* (November 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The game is a remarkable success both creatively and technically. Showing that video games can indeed be an art form, *Yoshi's Island* is a beautiful, engaging game, filled with lush graphics, great control, and innovative gameplay that push the Super NES to its outermost limits." – Skyler Miller (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This is bar none the absolute best platform-style video game adventure I have ever played. Better than all the other next generation system platformers out there right now, better than *Donkey Kong Country* or any of the previous Mario games for SNES or NES . . . The design team behind *Yoshi's Island* has given us a gift . . . blown away by the ingenuity on display. This is much more than just another Mario video game. It is a story that you're going to be able to enjoy again and again . . . It's like your favorite childhood coloring book come to life . . . The music is unbelievable! From the first strains of the music box that functions as the soundtrack for the prologue, you can tell you're in for an aural treat . . . The clarity, the stereo separation, the sheer musicality, is remarkable . . . In terms of sound effects, you're dealing with the same genius stuff here." – *Electric Playground* (November 1995)



I was a late adopter of the SNES, as I bought mine in early 1997. At the time, the two pack-in game options in Canada were *Killer Instinct* and *Yoshi's Island*. For some obscure reason I wanted *KI*, but it was sold out at Zellers, so I settled for *Yoshi's Island*, which turned out to be a great decision. I spent countless hours trying to complete the levels at 100%, crying Baby Mario be darned! – Sarah Szefer

Insider Insight:
Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island is such a unique Mario game, and one of my favorites in the series. It is much different than any other Mario game at the time, and it really pushed the graphics for the Super Nintendo by using the Super FX 2 microchip. I love the hand-drawn graphical look to the game; it really highlights Yoshi, and the music is amazing. *Yoshi's Island* is one of the best sequels for the Super Nintendo. My only knock on the game is that it should have been multiplayer like other Mario platforming games, but this is a must-own game in any Super Nintendo collection. – John Lester

Insider Insight:
I remember as a kid only having three channels to watch on television. We had the antenna on top of the house and everything. My folks told me later this was because of content on channels like HBO and MTV, which they felt were unwholesome for my and my brother's young and impressionable minds. However, my dad made sure we had supplemental entertainment with a gray video game box I came to know as the Super Nintendo. Since we didn't get the system until the mid-'90s, I got to experience *Super Mario World* and *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* at the same time.

While the original *Super Mario World* was pretty cool, it was more my brother's favorite. My jam was *Yoshi's Island*. Jumping, fluttering, eating everything that moved, and shooting eggs that came out of . . . where? I discovered Yoshi was *way* cooler when Mario was a baby than when adult Mario meets up with Yoshi in *Super Mario World*. I played *Yoshi's Island* almost every Saturday morning for months until my brother and I could beat the final boss with Baby Bowser. The music for that fight still gets me hyped up and ready to throw gigantic eggs!

It wasn't until my adult years when I longed for the SNES I once had that I purchased the console and game to then beat it on 100% completion. The colors, the animation style, the catchy soundtrack, the acid trip from touching floating dandelion creatures, the killing monkeys with watermelon seeds, the murder of a frog prince by violently throwing eggs at his uvula, and the most eardrum-rupturing "HEY! HEY! HEY!" you could imagine—these things will always be nostalgic for me, and hopefully some day for my children as well! – Mike Hodson

Insider Insight:
My first reactions to *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island* were of disbelief. This was no "Super Mario World" game. Where were the overworld maps? The P-Switches? What's with the crayon drawing art style? How dare they try and say this was a *Mario World* successor.

Then I played it and immediately found the fun.

The brilliance of *Yoshi's Island* is in the controls. The core mechanics of the game are for the player to use platforming know-how from previous Mario games, then add a wonderful attack mechanic that involves throwing and bouncing eggs that Yoshi himself creates. Generating your own ammunition is a great feeling as you munch and lay tons of eggs, only to feed them rapid fire at the massive bosses that stand in your way.

Beyond that, the visual style was highly unusual. Sure, it initially turned me off (I was an edgy teenager at the time), but in hindsight this visual treatment helped the game stand out—something that I appreciate now as a full-time game developer. What I did not know at the time was that the game was initially requested to use 3D graphics similar in style to *Donkey Kong Country*. The commitment that producer Miyamoto had to his unique vision inspires me to this day and leaves *Yoshi's Island* as one of my most treasured titles on the SNES. – Matt Raithel

Super Metroid

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo/ Intelligent Systems.
Game Type: Platform Shooter/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The third installment in the series, *Super Metroid* once again puts you in the role of Samus Aran, a female bounty hunter. Your mortal enemies are the Metroids, which are quick to reproduce and can engulf living creatures and absorb their energy.

In the first game—*Metroid* for the NES—Galactic Federation researchers discovered a new form of airborne life on planet SR388. They dubbed these dangerous jellyfish-like creatures Metroids and captured a few for later study. Unfortunately, as the crew sped toward Galactic Federation Headquarters, space pirates attacked the vessel, stole the Metroids, and took them to their home planet, Zebes. Soon the Mother Brain created an evil Metroid force. Samus's job was to eliminate the space pirates and destroy the Metroids. In the sequel, *Metroid II: Return of Samus* for the Game Boy, Samus was sent to planet SR388 to make the Metroids extinct once and for all. Her final battle was against the Metroid Queen.

According to *Super Metroid* lore, after destroying the queen Samus discovered a Metroid egg, which she procured and took with her to the Space Science Academy on the Galactic Federation Space Colony. Here scientists could examine the Metroid larva and understand its special organic structure. Naturally, those pesky Zebesian space pirates and their leader, Ridley, stole the larva and took it back to their rebuilt home planet. Samus promptly received an emergency directive from the Federation, ordering her to follow the pirates and save the hatchling. When she lands on Zebes, she finds that she must now take on an entire legion of space pirates, as well as a new Metroid force.

The planet Zebes is made up of six huge, non-linear sections. The surface area, which is under a constant deluge of rain, is called Crateria. Brinstar is a jungle area with a heavy maze of foliage. An underground water world called Maridia is full of killer crustaceans and ferocious fish. Deep below the surface of the planet lies the unbearably hot Norfair. The remains of an astronaut crash comprise the Wrecked Ship, and Tourian is the control center for the space pirates and Mother Brain. Throughout the game, you must break down color-coded doorways that were designed to prevent intruders from roaming into restricted areas.

As you run, jump, spin, roll, and shoot your way through strange, mysterious, threatening passageways, you can fire upon Chozo Statues, which will reveal special items that will help you in your mission. You can collect missile tanks, power bombs, a grappling beam (enabling you to swing into certain areas), an x-ray scope (allowing you to see hidden passages), and energy tanks. When you destroy enemy creatures, they sometimes leave behind missiles and energy balls.

At the beginning of *Super Metroid*, Samus is equipped with a normal beam. You can increase her power by collecting the following enhanced beams: Ice, which freezes enemies for a short time; Wave, which sends out a charge in a wavy pattern; Spazer, which is a three-beam attack; and Plasma, the most powerful beam of all. Two special suits of armor—the Varia Suit and the Gravity Suit—are available for use. The former suit cuts damage from enemy attacks in half and allows you to explore in especially hot areas, while the latter reduces damage from attacks to one-fourth and lets you explore freely in water-filled zones.

Special boot items you can find will help you reach higher places, jump continuously, fly through open areas, and run at super high speed while invincible. Superpowers you can acquire for use in turning yourself into a living weapon include morphing ball, bomb, spring ball, and screw attack, the last of which enables you to emit energy waves and somersault into enemies. In addition to battling space pirates, you must face a barrage of freakish creatures and numerous traps. You will ward off clawed Geruta, fireball-spitting dragons, cacti needle launching Cacatac, thorny bullet firing Evir, and any number of other creepy, crawly critters. Also, each level has a boss and mini-boss that you must defeat.

Super Metroid is a 24 Meg cartridge, and it includes a battery for saving your progress. Unlike the original *Metroid*, a mapping system is available to help you track your mission. There are several endings to the game, depending on how much time you spend trying to beat it. A shorter time results in a more spectacular finale. The game is followed by a number of sequels, including *Metroid Fusion* (GBA), *Metroid Prime* (GC), *Metroid: Zero Mission* (GBA), *Metroid Prime 2: Echoes* (GC), *Metroid Prime Pinball* (DS), *Metroid Prime Hunters* (DS), *Metroid Prime 3: Corruption* (Wii), and *Metroid: Other M* (Wii).

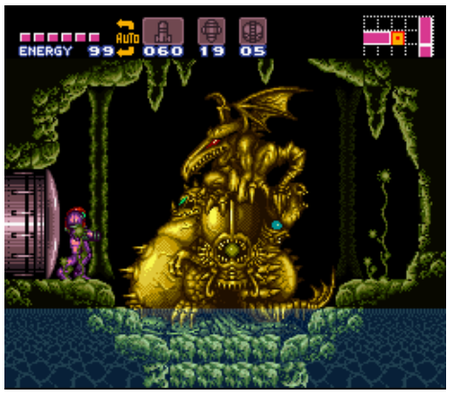
Fun Fact: The popular Screw Attack YouTube channel, website, and gaming convention is named after the screw attack maneuver in the *Metroid* series.

Notable Quotable:

"Maybe TOO similar to its 8-bit NES mommy, but jam-packed with challenging gameplay, haunting atmosphere, secret stuff, and xenomorphs begging to be blasted." – *Flux* #4 (1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The first *Metroid* on NES certainly deserves props for pioneering the series, but *Super Metroid* on SNES is its pinnacle. To many of the *Game Informer* staff, *Super Metroid* and *Metroid* easily make the top 10, but since we let the readers in on this list, *Super Metroid* slid down a bit. Best described as an RPG with no talk and all action, *Metroid* is an adventure like no other." – *Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked *Super Metroid* the twenty-ninth greatest video game of all time.



Insider Insight:

As the founder of NintendoAge, I am often asked what my favorite game of all time is, and I get the impression the people asking expect the obligatory "Zelda" or "Mario" responses. No question those are great games, but I continually come back to *Super Metroid*. To be sure, it is not a happy game. There are no words of encouragement from townspeople—there are neither towns, nor people (well, at least not alive!). There are no goals and no hints to help you along the way, at least not in the traditional sense.

In a way, *Super Metroid* is a long, drawn-out, cruel joke: you are thrust into a showdown with an end boss right from the get-go, followed by a near-panic attack when faced with having to escape a planet ready to explode. Maybe I'm cruel, or perhaps it is parental prerogative, but I never tire of watching my son play the intro to *Super Metroid*, seeing the sheer panic on his face while the screen tilts and the timer screams at him to hurry!

I wish I could say I have been as faithful to *Super Metroid* as it has been to me; I still have to cheat to beat it. It is one of the few games where I can't think of one thing that could improve it—it is a masterpiece from start to finish, save for the calluses still on my thumbs from learning to wall jump! – Dain Anderson

Insider Insight:

As a child growing up in the early '90s, my Saturday morning ritual revolved around cartoons. It did not matter how tired I was or how inviting the outside world seemed; Saturday morning cartoons were not to be missed. Whenever the television signal to our local network grew fuzzy, my brother and I would force our bleary-eyed parents downstairs so they could adjust our TV's rabbit ears. Then *Super Metroid* came along, and suddenly the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles didn't seem so interesting.

Super Metroid is a Swiss Watch of perfect design. Every element—from its graphics, to its gameplay, to its music—works in harmony to tell an incredibly haunting story about bounty hunter Samus Aran and her journey through an alien planet to recover the deadly organisms called Metroids. The first time I played it the planet Zebes felt incredibly isolating and haunting, but there were secrets around nearly every corner, and I wanted to explore every nook and cranny of its serpentine world.

To this day, I still consider *Super Metroid* my favorite game of all time. In recent years we have seen a host of indie games, such as *Ori and the Blind Forest*, *Axiom Verge*, and *Guacamelee* try to emulate *Metroid*'s formula. These games are incredible in their own right, but *Super Metroid* stands over them like a titan. Its greatness still has not been eclipsed. – Benjamin Reeves

Insider Insight:

I grew up on *Metroid* and the NES, but by the time the SNES rolled around I was "too cool" for Nintendo. I became a Sega Genesis guy, thinking that games like *Streets of Rage*, *Golden Axe*, and *Sonic the Hedgehog* were far superior to what Mario or Link could offer. A few years into the SNES lifespan a game came out that stopped me cold: *Super Metroid*.

Super Metroid? What's so super about it? Did Samus Aran now eat flowers and throw fireballs? I didn't own a Super Nintendo, but I *had* to have this game. I started selling Sega Genesis games, comic books, and basically anything that was not nailed down. I would walk my street with a lawn mower, knocking on people's doors. Come on, cheapskate, I need my video game system! Finally I had enough for the SNES and a copy of *Super Metroid*.

As I started playing the game, I found myself walking through a seemingly still laboratory. I was instantly puzzled. What the hell was this? Was the game released incomplete? Was my copy of this game defective? I entered a room to find the gigantic hulking Ridley, a creature I thought I had destroyed in the first *Metroid*. I started throwing everything I had at the monster. He would not die. Ridley just flew away, and a countdown timer started telling me to escape. I flicked the power switch off and then on again. Screw that; I was not letting that monster get away!

Through the lab again, up to Ridley, laser shot after laser shot. But no matter what I did, the beast would fly away. They made a game that starts off with a boss fight that is unwinnable. My mind was completely blown. My OCD kicked in, and I tried several more times to no avail. By the time I actually started the game I had already played for hours, finally letting go of the need to kill this un-killable creature.

Super Metroid was my gateway to the SNES, for which I still own several dozen carts. But to this day, whenever I start a game of *Super Metroid*, I try my hardest to kill that damned Ridley, still hoping that one day I can beat this amazing game in just the first few minutes. – Ryan McLelland

Super Ninja Boy

Publisher: Culture Brain.
Developer: Culture Brain.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Known as *Super Chinese World* in Japan, *Super Ninja Boy* finds Chinaland overrun with monsters following in the wake of a peace conference with an alien named Rub-A-Doc, who is the Universal Peace Act Leader. It is an unusual RPG, in that it augments the typical overhead view exploratory areas with side-scrolling combat and even some platforming action (including super jumps) in caves and dungeons. Also unusual is the two-player simultaneous mode.

As you journey across a world map that includes caves, forests, mountains, and the like, you will frequently enter into random battles in which you punch (including flame punches), kick, and throw an assortment of enemies, all in real time. Pausing the game lets you equip weapons (including shurikens, thunder swords, and star bombs) and use experience building magic.

Boss encounters are more traditional turn-based battles with the option to select fight, item, magic, and run. In one-player mode, the protagonist is Jack. A second gamer can join in as Ryu. Allies and Celestials will grant information, rewards, and tactics, or play mini-games with you on a sub-screen. Places to explore in this cartoonish and comical but challenging game include Chinaland, Mysteryland, Fairyland, and Futureland. Purchasing new items, talking to residents, and resting at hotels are all part of the experience. Passwords save progress.

A sequel of sorts to *Little Ninja Brothers* for the NES, *Super Ninja Boy* is not as well-known, nor as critically acclaimed as such esteemed SNES RPGs as *Breath of Fire*, *Chrono Trigger*, *EarthBound*, *Final Fantasy II*, *Final Fantasy III*, or *Super Mario RPG*, but it deserves a spot in any fan of the genre's gaming library.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Ninja Boy* is an average game at best. While it does some things right, such as offering a unique battle system different to other RPGs at the time, it also suffers from a poor translation, an impressively high encounter rate, and graphics that, in 1993, were less than impressive. *Super Ninja Boy* is certainly playable, but only the more brazen RPG aficionados will tolerate this curiosity of a video game." – Random Access (randomacc.net)

Notable Quotable:

"An interesting combination of a few different genres . . . the action can be pretty slow and choppy . . . it doesn't help that the game has the typical early'90s RPG encounter rate, as in this game was made to be artificially long because you fall into a random encounter every six steps, so that gets really old . . . the hit detection isn't always the greatest. You have to be right next to your enemy to register a hit . . . If you're going to play *Super Ninja Boy*, I strongly, strongly recommend that it be with another player . . . kind of tedious on single-player . . . The story is very simple, and honestly it's barely worth mentioning." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"You can't go more than five steps at a time without running into an enemy. This makes it a real pain to play the game for very long, much less see it to completion . . . There is always the choice to flee, but again, it doesn't always work . . . *Super Ninja Boy* houses a pretty cool idea that was executed fairly well—it was just the encounter rate that killed it for most people, including myself . . . it suffered from a horrible translation job. It is so bad that entire chunks of sentences are missing in places. This makes an already weak story weaker (the identity of the bad guy is a complete no-brainer from the start), which may put off RPG fans . . . It may not have the most interesting story ever or even interesting characters, but its fusion of two vastly different genres is definitely something to remember it by." – Ashley Davis (www.destructoid.com)

Super Noah's Ark 3D

Publisher: Wisdom Tree.
Developer: Wisdom Tree.
Game Type: First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Spared from the Great Flood by an otherwise vengeful God, Noah's time in the ark is almost up—he and his family can exit for dry land in a mere six days. Unfortunately, the camels, giraffes, monkeys, kangaroos, sheep, antelopes, and other animals are restless and out of their cages. You, as Noah, must walk around the ark, using a slingshot to shoot food at the animals (including bosses) to put them to sleep. Each animal behaves differently. For example, goats, which cannot open doors, take one hit to put down and can only kick Noah. Oxen, on the other hand, can spit at Noah from long range. Ostriches are fast and take several hits to put to sleep.

If Noah runs out of food, he must hand-feed grain to the animals. Luckily, he can pick up extra food ammo (including powerful cantaloupes and watermelons) throughout the game's thirty levels. Other items to grab include fruit (50 pieces grants an extra life), a Super Feeder 5000 weapon, keys for accessing locked rooms, and bread crumbs, bandages, and blue globes for health replenishment.

The only commercially released unlicensed game for the SNES produced when the system was still new on store shelves, *Super Noah's Ark 3D*—a rare title these days—uses id Software's *Wolfenstein 3D* engine. To get the game to work, you have to plug a standard SNES cartridge into the top of the *Super Noah's Ark 3D* cartridge, thereby circumventing Nintendo's lockout chip. The game is based on the Biblical story of Noah and the flood, which you can find in the book of Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Wisdom Tree rode *Wolfenstein 3-D*'s coattails to bring us a game that, while technically better than many other Wisdom Tree games, is still very insulting to our intelligence." – GameCola (gamecola.net)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Noah's Ark 3D* is exactly what you'd expect from an unlicensed developer, and perhaps actually somewhat more. Unlike all those old NES knockoffs you could easily find along the streets of Hong Kong back in the day, this one is actually playable and makes some sense, to a certain extent. To be honest, this game is not the worst of the library, and in fact I've encountered much worse on the SNES." – Random Access (randomacc.net)

Insider Insight:

As a serious collector of video games, I knew most of the odd places to shop for them. Many did not realize it, but unlicensed biblical games published by Wisdom Tree were sold in many Christian bookstores. Our local mall was home to Zondervan, and that was where I picked up a copy of *Super Noah's Ark 3D*.

Being a fan of *Wolfenstein 3-D*, I felt right at home with the new paint job, but playing as Noah instead of William "B.J." Blazkowicz was a bit of a stretch. The ark seemed safer than the Nazi bunker, and that was good, considering I was armed with a slingshot in place of the traditional machine guns, flamethrowers, and rocket launchers I was accustomed to wielding. I was surprised that The Spear of Destiny, a.k.a. the Holy Lance, did not make an appearance, as it would have fit right in with the biblical theme.

The Super Nintendo does not excel at three-dimensional rendering. However, the production values of this title, while not the best, are not a sin. I am also happy to report that the game did not take me forty days and forty nights to complete! – Michael Thomasson

Super Nova

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: Taito.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Known as *Darius Force* in Japan, *Super Nova* is the follow-up to *Darius Twin*. Before going into action you select one of three Silver Hawk ships: the green one from *Darius* (main arms are wave shot, multi bomb, and sway laser); the blue one from *Darius II* (napalm shot, search bomb, and sway laser); or a new prototype ship specific to this game (hi press laser shot, break bomb, and round laser). The horizontal (and sometimes vertical) action moves slowly (á la *Super R-Type* for the SNES) as you fly through exotic caves, space stations, and other areas of outer space, shooting waves of alien ships and stopping down to battle the occasional boss, including the giant mechanical fish creatures the series is famous for. As with *R-Type*, you will also shoot through terrain.

Grabbing power-ups that appear in the form of orbs lets you strengthen your shots and bombs, and regenerate your shield. Touching certain orbs destroys all on-screen enemies. There are three different endings determined by the path you take: 5, 6, or 7 stages. When you die shots and bombs are powered down to the minimum level, and you have to go back to a checkpoint or the beginning of the level, helping make for a super challenging game. Unfortunately, the two-player co-op mode from *Darius Twin* and other games in the series is missing. Followed by *Darius Gaiden* (arcade, Saturn, PSX), *G-Darius* (arcade, PSX), *Darius R* (GBA), and various other sequels.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Nova* is an exciting and frustrating game, all at the same time. It should be ideal for players who refuse to give up against almost insurmountable odds." – *Electronic Games* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Many levels are completely flat and insipid . . . the tunes are mostly forgettable . . . the option of following the branching paths gives the game some variety and a massive dose of replay value . . . no two stages play the same . . . even the repeated bosses have slightly differing attacks each time you meet them . . . the fancy formation flying of many of the spacecraft, paired with the inordinate bullet count effected by the mines and wall guns, make things so difficult that you'll likely overlook how boring your adversaries look." – Marc Golding (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight:

For me, *Super Nova* could easily be referred to as a "gateway" title. This was the 2D shooter that permanently christened me a shmup fanatic for life. From the moment I first saw the game, I was in love with its sci-fi visuals and marine biology-inspired designs. I first played it at a friend's house around Christmas '93. Like a lot of kids that year, my friend and his younger brother had received a Super Nintendo, along with a couple games, one of which was *Super Nova*.

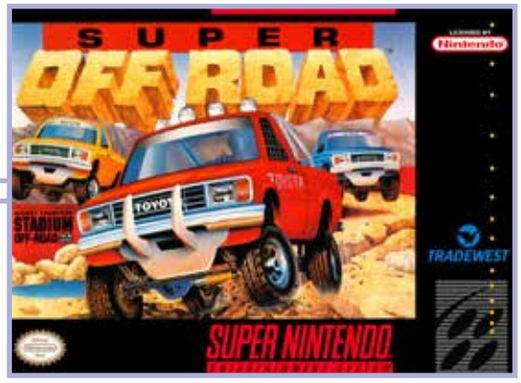
I had certainly played 2D shooters before, but mostly on the 8-bit NES, so I was absolutely entranced by *Super Nova*'s slick graphics and great audio on the 16-bit platform—it still features one of my favorite SNES soundtracks. The game's difficulty was downright punishing at times, but the rush of making it through a level and defeating the cool-looking bosses was addictive. *Super Nova*'s branching level paths was something I had personally never seen a shooter do before and really gave the game a lot of replay value.

A few years later, I was overjoyed to learn that *Super Nova* was merely the North American localization of *Darius Force* for the Super Famicom, and part of an entire series of shooters known as "Darius." I made it a point to track down and play (and own) every title in the franchise over the years, even importing several titles that never saw localization outside Japan.

Thanks to *Super Nova*'s impression on me all those years ago, *Darius* is my favorite series in the entire 2D shooter genre. The visual themes and general aesthetics of the *Darius* games always seem to find their way into my art one way or another, and have even inspired in me a great love for marine biology—likewise a huge personal creative influence. *Super Nova* may not be the greatest entry in the *Darius* franchise, but for me, as a gamer and an artist, it will always have a special place in my heart. – Kale Menges

Super Off Road

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Rally/Off-Road Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



Based on Leland's 1989 arcade game, *Ivan "Ironman" Stewart's Super Off Road*, *Super Off Road* for the Super Nintendo lacks the three-player mode found in the coin-op classic and the four-player mode of the NES version (which kept the Ivan Stewart licensing), but it is still a fast and fun game with a rocking, guitar-heavy soundtrack. Players speed their truck around sixteen different single-screen dirt tracks (with such names as Bluster, Big Dukes, Fandango, Hurricane Gulch, and Sidewinder) that are riddled with such obstacles as barriers, pits, potholes, hay piles, hills, ridges, and ripples.

A user-friendly money system lets you earn cash by picking it up on the tracks, and by placing in the top three races. You can use this money to purchase upgrades in acceleration, top speed, tires, and shocks. You can also grab speed-boosting nitros on the tracks, as well as purchase them. Each race features four trucks on the track, which makes the lack of a four-player mode regrettable. Despite this shortcoming, fans of such games as *Super Sprint*, *R.C. Pro-Am*, and *Rock N' Roll Racing* should enjoy this game, which features an isometric, top-down view of the action.

Notable Quotable:

"As a two-player head-to-head it's great, but in one-player mode it's sadly limited. As coin-op conversions go, it's first-class, true to the original, looks brilliant, sounds awesome, and plays like a dream but gets tiresome very quickly. Recommended only for serious *Off Road* fans." – *N-Force* (June 1992).

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics and sound are both super cool, and somebody has gone to an awful lot of trouble to get the arcade feel of the game just right, but the 'can't catch up' syndrome is a real playability downer and it's the one reason we have to mark *Super Off Road* as another one of those potentially brilliant Super NES games which lets down its own tires on the very last lap. Great fun, but it could have been untouchable." – *Computer and Video Games* (April 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"The four-player competition is gone. Not only does the computer take over the two remaining vehicles, but they are unflinchingly the best and worst on the track, respectively. That means that you're going to come in second or third almost all of the time. That certainly takes the competitive edge away from the game, especially when you play solo. Another really good reason is that there are no options . . . Although there are sixteen different courses in all, some of the best ones don't show up until you've done the earlier ones two or three times . . . The playfield looks just like it did in the arcade. The Super NES' excellent color palette is mostly responsible for this. With its many shades of brown, you might think you're looking at a digitized image of an actual track. The trucks themselves are very tiny, and it takes a little while to get the hang of re-orienting yourself when you spin out of control, but that's a minor point. The sound effects are sparse but effective, and the soundtrack is outstanding. I had to laugh, though, when I first entered the parts selection screen and the Toyota theme song pumped through my speakers." – Joe Santulli (www.digitpress.com)

Super Off Road: The Baja

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: Leland Interactive Media.
Game Type: Rally/Off-Road Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A Super NES exclusive, *Super Off Road: The Baja* eschews the isometric overhead viewpoint and single-screen, round-and-round tracks of the original *Super Off Road* in favor of a behind-the-truck perspective and Mode 7-enhanced tracks that go on for virtual miles and end in a different place than where you began. Players, competing against seven other racers, cruise day and night over the desert hills and through the twists, turns, and valleys of tracks in three tournaments: the Mexico 250, the Ensenada 500, and the Baja 1000.

Success in races against other drivers garners cash to purchase upgrades, including brakes, tires, shocks, lights, engines, and nitros (speed boosts), but hitting deer, trees, cacti, trucks, people riding four-wheelers, and other obstacles takes money away (strangely enough, hitting animals is more costly than running over humans). You can also gain cash by collecting money bags along the oft-bumpy tracks, which feature a lot of jumps. Three difficulty levels are available. Unlike *Super Off Road* for the SNES, which lacked the licensing, Ivan "Ironman" Stewart lends his image to *Super Off Road: The Baja*.

Notable Quotable:

"Unlike *Super Off Road*, the sequel wears short very quickly . . . Half the races are so similar to one another that the sense of accomplishment when moving from one leg of a race to the next is severely diminished . . . There are only around four different songs in the game, but they have a fair amount of personality and do a good job reflecting the flavor of the atmosphere . . . Sound effects are competently done . . . There are plenty of small hills and streams to rush over, so it's great fun to see how long you can zip along the rough terrain before hitting so many obstacles that your truck is ruined . . . good for a bit of frantic fun." – Jason Venter (www.honestgamers.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The use of Mode 7 to simulate the various track conditions is the game's greatest strength and biggest hindrance . . . The engine powering the game is simply amazing . . . *F-Zero* and *Super Mario Kart* used the same third-person viewpoint but neither were able to recreate hills, valleys, and peaks the way the *Baja* does it. Every track is a cavalcade of terrain, all of which have somewhat of an effect on handling. Whether it's a drive through the desert or seaside, very few of the courses share the same look. Tradewest pulled out all the stops, with many jumps and course-side attractions to spice up the visuals . . . The landscapes are a bit pixilated, but you'll have no trouble identifying the environments . . . Sadly, the music isn't up to par with the visuals . . . The sound effects are awesome . . . They make such a lovely death squeal, I can't help but run over pedestrians just to hear the sound . . . The track designs are where the issues lie. I think the developers were a bit too anxious to exploit the tech they created since every course is a nonstop series of hills that throw you in the air or around the track constantly. This wouldn't be a problem if it didn't damage your truck so much." – Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

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Super Pinball: Behind the Mask

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: meldac/KAZe.
Game Type: Pinball, 1–4 players (alternating).
Year: 1994.

Super Pinball: Behind the Mask features three pinball tables—Jolly Joker, Blackbeard & Ironmen, and Wizard—each of which will please the pinball purist. Ball physics are right on target (so to speak), flipper action is smooth, and the graphics and sound effects evoke the real thing. Each board is essentially the same, though, with two flippers, several drop targets, two kickbacks, three thumper bumpers, and one outhole down the middle. Skill shots, multi-ball play (unfortunately hampered by slowdown), "shoot again when lit," and other staples of traditional pinball are fully in place. Plus, you can nudge the table to influence ball movement.

Ironically, what makes this title a solid pinball game—realism—is its primary blemish. A lack of scrolling playfields, over-the-top adventure elements, multi-level boards, or other such extravagances keep it from being a great video game. One concession to the fact that this is a video game and not a pinball machine is a special Conquest Mode, in which one player challenges all three tables. On each table you must score a certain number of points to reach a forbidden door. Once you have done that, you've got thirty seconds to shoot the ball into Mystery (Jolly Joker), Blackbeard's Treasure House (Blackbeard & Ironmen), or Limbo (Wizard). The standard version of the game, in which four players alternate on their own board, is called Competition Mode.

Memories: During the late '70s and early '80s, my brother and I went to the arcades on a frequent basis and soon became pinball wizards. We were especially good at Stern's *Hot Hand* (1979) and Bally's *Dolly Parton* (1979), and would pop multiple games on them and sell those games two-for-a-quarter to earn money to play video games. My brother was especially good and could beat virtually any machine. When Bally's fancy, futuristic *Xenon* hit The Land of Oz arcade at our local mall in 1980, my brother popped a game on it the first time he played it, obliterating the score necessary to do so.

Notable Quotable:

"Video pinball games are getting faster and more sophisticated, but this game takes you back to the old pinball days. It's straightforward and not very imaginative." – *GamePro* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Despite cheesy music that sounds like it was left over from *Pilotwings*, the colorful graphics, easy controls, and challenge make this one of the best video pinball games—on any system—to date." – *FLUX* (April 1994)

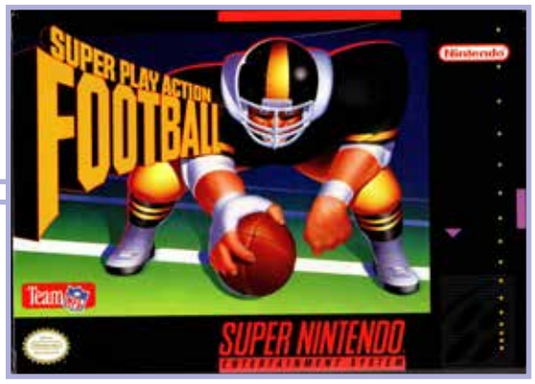
Insider Insight:

I am as much an aficionado of pinball as I am of video games. When video games pushed the silver ball out of the arcades I was quite sad. While video pinball can never replace the traditional game, I was still happy to see *Super Pinball: Behind the Mask* get published. I remember reading the gaming magazines in anticipation of this release. The printed photos made the game look fabulous.

Sadly, while this game is the prettiest of the pinball titles on the Super Nintendo, it does not play a good game of pinball. All three tables are very simplistic, repetitive, and lack depth. While this game could be a decent introduction to pinball, true enthusiasts of the game will be bored. The 240 quarters I spent to purchase this game could have gone much farther in the arcade itself. – Michael Thomasson

Super Play Action Football

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo/Tose.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



The sequel to *NES Play Action Football*, *Super Play Action Football* looks a little better than its 8-bit counterpart, but it suffers from the same basic malady: a diagonal top-down perspective that makes controls and passing awkward, and gives gamers a too-small view of the field. There is a radar view of the entire field, but it is not very helpful. One clear advantage this game has over its predecessor is that the camera zooms out when a pass is thrown. The biggest disadvantage is the lack of a four-player mode.

Twenty-eight NFL teams are represented by their official logos, but unlike the original game (which fielded eight teams sans the logos) there is no NFLPA license, meaning no real players. There are also ninety-seven college teams (sans real player and university names) and even some high school squads. If you play well in the college ranks you will earn a bowl bid, and if you do well in the pros you will play the Super Bowl. Post-game stats reveal how each team and each player ranks as the season progresses.

Super Play Action Football has a respectable number of options (including game time and difficulty level), plays (32 offensive, 16 defensive), and realistic attributes (such as substitutions, diving, stiff arming, and twisting away from tackles), but its faults make it vastly inferior to the mighty *Tecmo Super Bowl*.

Notable Quotable:

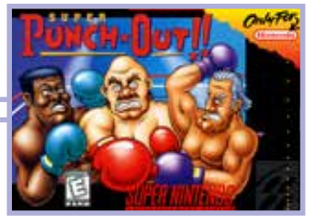
"Nintendo's in-house properties rarely fail, but sports games were one of their major weak points. They produced a few fun ones, but had just as many (if not more) complete failures. Their biggest disaster was venturing into football with the *Play Action Football* series." – Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The players are so huge that you never actually see your receivers on the screen. Playing defense is equally frustrating, as you're constantly being held by linemen. After each play players scatter like roaches, followed by a pause as you wait for the referee to appear on the bottom of the screen—even if he has nothing to say! Most of the time he just stands there like a dork, and it's unintentionally hilarious. My buddies were literally rolling on the floor with laughter. Occasionally the game cuts away from the action to show a bunch of ugly people watching the action on a TV in the concession area. If it looks like they're watching a train wreck, well now you know why." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Super Punch-Out!!

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Sports/Boxing, 1 player.
Year: 1994.



Based on Nintendo's 1985 arcade game of the same name, *Super Punch-Out!!* is the graphically and sonically superior Super NES update to *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, the NES classic. The game has you boxing your way through round after round against an assortment of wacky characters: Gabby Jay, Bear Hugger, Piston Hurricane, Bald Bull, Bob Charlie, Dragon Chan, Masked Muscle, Mr. Sandman, Aran Ryan, Heike Kagero, Mad Clown, Super Macho Man, Narcis Prince, Hoy Quarlow, Rick Bruiser, and Nick Bruiser. Some of the characters return from the earlier games, while others are new. Each has a different special move and fighting pattern.

Your boxer in this game is transparent, allowing for a first-person perspective—a view that remains faithful to the original arcade version of the first *Punch-Out!!* from 1984. Defensive positions include guarding, dodging, and ducking, while punching maneuvers include a variety of uppercuts, hooks, body blows, and jabs. Each punch has different power and speed. You can use special knockout punches when you build up your power meter (as opposed to the star system used in *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*). Stamina meters allow you to track you and your opponent's fatigue factor.

Cartoonish graphics, unorthodox moves, and arcade-style gameplay underscore the title's lack of realism, but it is a fun arcade-style experience, and there is strategy involved—this is not a simple button-masher. You should watch your opponent's moves closely, as they usually telegraph their moves before attacking, and dodging and ducking play important roles. You can play Championship Mode, in which you must progress through the four circuits; or Time Attack Mode, which enables you to select the opponent of your choice and try to improve your time record. The game features battery-backed memory and allows you to enter your name so records and data can be saved for the next time you fire up your SNES.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the best new additions was Time Attack Mode, which kept track of the best knockout times for every opponent. You can spend hours just trying to shave off precious milliseconds in the attempt to KO Super Machoman before the one-minute mark. Everyone who enjoyed the original is encouraged to check out its excellent 16-bit sequel." – *Game Informer* (March 2002)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Punch-Out!!* is a really tough game, but it's one in which repeated playing (and you will be playing it a lot) really pays off. Once you learn the ropes, you learn how to actually fight better, how to take advantage of your opponent's weaknesses, and how to really stick it to 'em when you need to. What I thought at first to be an unfair computer eventually turned out to be a weakling after I went around the block a couple of times. I became a boxing fool." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

Insider Insight: *Super Punch-Out!!* is an interesting game to me, as I played it so much growing up that I thought I was the best in the world! Many moons later, I found out there was a world record scoreboard called Twin Galaxies. I decided to look up *Super Punch-Out!!*, as I knew I had to have top records. Low and behold, my save file on my cartridge from many years prior had the top records in the world for the majority of the boxers! The crazy aspect is that I did eventually set a live world record versus Gabby Jay at a game convention, along with various other ones as years went on.

I have always been the kind to "shave off one more second" when playing games, and that works perfectly with *Super Punch-Out!!* Each punch you throw requires pinpoint timing, allowing you to counter every single punch that the opponent will throw. This means that you basically do not have to dodge at all and will knock them out in record time. Of course, any deviation from how you play, including movements, will alter how the other boxer reacts. It is the ultimate game of human chess, and you really have to think analytically on the fly to be able to truly master this aspect of the game.

I have yet to try to submit any more records for the game, as Twin Galaxies is a shell of its former self. Some day I may dust off my gloves and knock out the rest of the boxers! I always wonder how many other people are sitting in the shadows with their own game saves having world-record-setting times and scores. This randomness makes the record-setting community exciting to me. – Jeffrey Wittenhagen

Super Putty

Publisher: U.S. Gold.
Developer: System 3 Software.
Game Type: Vertical Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1993.

A port of *Putty*—the 1992 Commodore Amiga game—*Super Putty* is a silly, comical, brightly colored, musically fun game in which players control a blue blob of putty that can bounce, explode (like a smart bomb), stretch across gaps and up and down to platforms, squiggle along the ground, inflate himself, execute a long-range punch, and flatten himself to absorb enemies and items, which you can find in such places as palm trees and crates.

The blob of putty, which has eyes, can also mold himself into the shapes of other creatures throughout the game's six enemy- and power-up filled areas. The game features six multi-stage worlds—Putty Moon, Dazzledaze Villa, Technofear, Oriental Rooms, Toytown, and Twilight Zone—and forty quirky enemy types, including birds, blobs, bug-eyed beings, little guys that shoot missiles, flying hags, firework imps, Loopy Lightbulbs, and Hopalong Hogs. Obstacles, such as electricity and rolling barrels, will also get in your way.

Power-ups are frequently playful, such as Uncle Ted, a man who plays a Hammond Organ to freeze the enemies. The basic objective is to free the Putty people by absorbing and transporting Bots scattered throughout the levels to safe areas within a time limit. Controls are tricky, there are lots of narrow ledges, and the enemies can be tough to avoid, but gameplay is enjoyable, and the light puzzle elements are easy to solve. Unlike most platformers, *Super Putty* scrolls vertically instead of horizontally. Known as *Putty Moon* in Japan. A sequel, *Putty Squad*, hit the SNES in 1994, but only in PAL regions.

Notable Quotable:

"There's a lot to like in *Super Putty*. The game has a real sense of humor—expect encounters with a hot dog named Steve MacLean and an exploding Kamikaze Chicklet." – *GamePro* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"While the size of each level remains constant, the platform layout and complexity varies. In this way, each level of *Super Putty* presents a new puzzle. Since our blue titular hero can only carry one robot at a time, success depends therefore on finding the quickest way to get from the bottom of the level to the top and back down again, as obviously saving the required number of robots will take multiple trips. It gives the game a puzzling 'racey' feeling that is often lacking in platformers." – Julian Hill (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:

"It's risky to center a game on blobs of putty, but the goofiness of *Super Putty* works in the game's favor. While actual gameplay bears

a certain similarity to Mario-ish action games, the various moves that are unique to Putty inject originality into the title . . . otherwise a pretty basic game . . . good soundtrack keeps things moving . . . Cartoon-like sound effects include cool digitizations of a truly annoying feline. Some characters have great sounds while others are almost mute. Characters are nicely animated; moves and expressions are straight from cartoonland. The backgrounds are generally lifeless and repetitive . . . Repetition, plus lack of a good continue feature, may leave you bored. – *Game Players* (February 1994)

Super R.B.I. Baseball

Publisher: Time Warner Interactive.
Developer: Gray Matter.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

The debut of the R.B.I. series on the Super NES, *Super R.B.I. Baseball* features 700 MLBPA players—including such stars as Juan Gonzalez, Cecil Fielder, Frank Thomas, and Roger Clemens—from twenty-eight teams from cities corresponding to their Major League counterparts. There is no MLB license so the team names and logos are missing, and the uniform colors have been altered.

Player statistics and rosters are based on the 1994 season, and you can also select from any of the Division Champions from 1989–93 or the All-Star squads from 1989–94. Modes include Single Game, Home Run Derby, Defense Practice, Game Breakers (17 different scenarios for you to try and finish), Best of Seven series, and League, which lets you play a single game against every team in the league.

Gameplay, which begins with a 16-bit rendition of "The Star Spangled Banner," is arcade-based. You can bunt, swing for the fences, steal bases, jump and dive for the ball, make substitutions, move around the batter's box, change the pitcher's position on the mound, throw fastballs, sinkers, and curves, and more. Once you hit the ball in the air the perspective switches to a bird's-eye view of the field, and the camera follows the ball.

Super R.B.I. Baseball is similar to *R.B.I. Baseball '93* on the Genesis with its cartoonish players, authentic-looking stadiums (which have been altered some, thanks to a lack of licensing), cheering crowd, and "action windows" on the left and right sides of the screen showing animated clips. The game includes play-by-play analysis by Jack Buck, organ music, three difficulty levels (easy, normal, and hard), and three types of defense: assisted, automatic, and manual.

Notable Quotable:
"*Super R.B.I. Baseball* just doesn't offer the excitement or gameplay you should expect from a Super NES baseball game." – *Game Players* (June 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The thing about *Super R.B.I. Baseball* is that it looks really, really bad. The graphics are downright poor." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (June 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"With more features than any other baseball cart, *Super R.B.I.* should've been serious competition for excellent games like *World Series Baseball*. Too bad the controls undercut that potential." – *GamePro* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The only reason this game exists is to lure unsuspecting Super Nintendo owners who may think that having real players means real baseball. Don't be fooled—this game has virtually no positive aspects to speak of and remains one of the worst baseball titles available on the system." – All Game Guide (formerly allgame.com)

Super R-Type

Publisher: Irem.
Developer: Irem.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

A sequel to the highly influential *R-Type* (arcade, 1987), *Super R-Type* shares some of the same bosses and stages with *R-Type II* (arcade, 1989). Unfortunately, the mid-stage save points are missing (causing inevitable frustration), and when the screen gets busy excessive slowdown ensues—a common problem with early Super NES games. Despite its faults, *Super R-Type* remains an engrossing and enjoyable shooter, thanks in part to a fair degree of challenge tampered by unlimited continues.

Players guide the R-9 ship through gorgeous outer space settings (which were obviously inspired by the movie *Alien*) in seven stages: Space (asteroid belt); Ruins (same as the first stage of the coin-op *R-Type II*; enemies emerge from the water and ground); Cave (certain enemies rush toward you even though struck by weapons); Giant Space Ship (tanks and flying enemies emerge from the hull); Mining Field (the maze-like stage from the coin-op *R-Type II*); Recycling Factory (riddled with elevators and belt conveyors); and Baido Empire (same as the last stage of the coin-op *R-Type II*). Each stage has a boss, such as Illuminator, which has four revolving arms that shoot rocks; and Zabtom, which shoots mega-bullets, laser charges (from his head), and mega-flashers (from his chest). Standard enemies include such exotic aliens as Ironclaw, Crawlgar, and Guardgoyle.

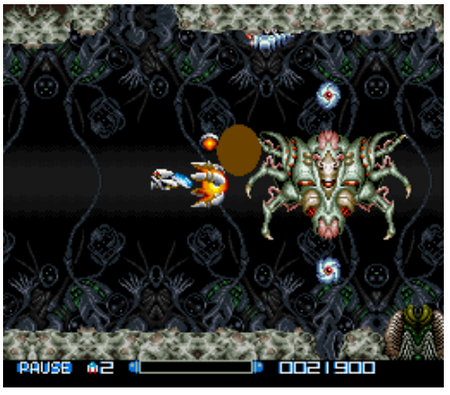
The trademark shooting, power-up system, and detachable weaponry of the *R-Type* series remain intact. As the action auto-scrolls to the right you dodge and shoot enemies while avoiding their projectiles. In addition to utilizing your standard firepower, you can destroy blue and red power armor to make power-ups appear. Red power armor yields four types of missiles: chasing (chases and attacks enemies); anti-ground (bomb spheres continually by falling diagonally); speed (makes your ship go faster); and pit (remains by player to assist in battle). Blue power armor yields five types of lasers: reflecting (keeps reflecting when it strikes an obstacle); anti-air (circular lasers); split (disperses lasers to a fixed distance); laser (similar to reflecting); and shooting gun (fires in a straight line). When you obtain a laser unit the invincible force weapon appears. It surrounds and protects your ship and can attack and be powered up. Followed by *R-Type III*.

Notable Quotable:

"If you give up easily or have a low frustration level, approach *Super R-Type* with extreme caution. Mastery does not come easily, but it's worth the effort." – *GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"It's vintage *R-Type*, with incredible graphics, sharp weapons, and awesome enemies. It's too easy and too short, but the trip is spectacular." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (September 1991)



Notable Quotable:

"The gorgeous graphics of the original are faithfully reproduced, the sound is excellent, and the bonus level is a real treat—but there's something missing. Even this Irem conversion doesn't manage to reproduce the smooth arcade feel of the incredible original . . . Occasionally some jerky background scrolling can be detected and sometimes—horror of horrors—the sprites flicker! Generally speaking this is a fine game, but in my view a conversion of this magnitude ought to be flawless on a machine like the Super Famicom—and perfect this ain't." – *Computer and Video Games* (September 1991)

Insider Insight:
In the early '90s I was just finishing college, and my gaming maturation had made me a Sega Genesis guy through and through. I had never owned an NES, nor was I at all interested in the "kid-focused" Super Nintendo (at least this is what Sega's advertising led us to believe). This all changed when I walked into a friend's house and became entranced watching him blast his way through the third level of *Super R-Type*. I had always enjoyed shoot-'em-ups on the Atari VCS and the Genesis, but *Super R-Type* on the Super Nintendo was the next level—the sprites were fantastic, the sound effects and music were almost arcade perfect, and the gameplay was second to none.

Once I finally got my chance to grab the gamepad I did not give it up for the rest of the night. The difficulty of the game became my nemesis, and I played wave after wave, game after game, learning to use the inevitable "enemy on-screen overload framerate drop" to my advantage, *Matrix*-style. After that, my Genesis games just didn't feel as "right" as they did before.

A few years later I finally picked up my own SNES console, and one of the first games I sought out was *Super R-Type*. Not only was it my first exposure to the SNES, but *Super R-Type* was the game that made this Genesis fan take notice of what Nintendo was doing and realize that maybe all of those funny Sega commercials were disguising the fact that the Super Nintendo might just be doing it better. – Holt Slack

Super Scope 6

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Intelligent Systems.
Game Type: Light Gun Shooter, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1992.

The pack-in cartridge with the Super Scope light gun peripheral, *Super Scope 6* contains six colorful and challenging games. The games are divided into two groupings of three titles each. The "Blastris" games are *Blastris A*, *Blastris B*, and *Mole Patrol*. Falling under the "LaserBlazer" umbrella are *Intercept*, *Engage*, and *Confront*.

In *Blastris A*, you shoot *Tetris*-style block shapes consisting of four squares each as they enter from the left side of the screen and move toward the right. Shooting the squares arranges the blocks, and when you form a vertical line those blocks will disappear. In *Blastris B* individual blocks fall down the playfield. Shooting a block spins it to reveal a different color. To clear a row, arrange more than three of the same color vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. *Mole Patrol* is similar to classic *Whac-A-Mole*, but you shoot Blue Molians and Red Molians as they pop up instead of bopping moles on the head with a mallet.

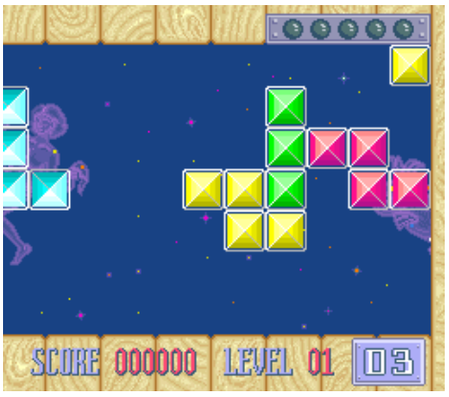
Intercept has you shooting down missiles that are fired by the enemy using the fewest shots possible. If you miss five missiles it is game over. Occasionally Bowser will appear, chasing Mario. You should shoot Bowser while trying not to blast Nintendo's famous mascot. In *Engage*, you must engage and shoot down all the enemy fighters before you run out of fuel. Finally, *Confront* pits you against an armada of enemy robots trying to land. You will shoot them with your anti-aircraft type cannon.

Each game offers solid entertainment, making this a nice package deal, but holding the bazooka-like gun and aiming through its little site gets physically tiring after a while, so you probably will not want to scope out all six games in one play session. In Europe and Australia the game is called *Nintendo Scope 6*.

Notable Quotable:
"*Super Scope 6* has a few innovative ideas sprinkled throughout, but like Sega's *Menacer* collection, once the novelty wears off it starts to feel like a chore." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:
"I actually found the Super Scope itself to be quite an impressive piece of hardware which worked surprisingly well. Most light phasers I've used in the past were a tad unresponsive and inaccurate, not so the Super Scope. I did find that after prolonged use, I suffered from a very numb shoulder. The game cartridge supplied shows the potential of the Scope very well. Each of the games is well-presented and easy to get into, but I did find that all of them grew quite boring after a short space of time, especially the three-game Lazer Blazer (which is just one game with different graphics for each section)." – *Mean Machines* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"My parents got me this when I was maybe six or seven years old, because apparently they thought it would be comedy gold to watch their son attempt to play games with a device that was more than half his size. I didn't find it funny. Oh, no. Instead, I felt like a combination of Rambo, Predator, and the Terminator . . . I would carry it around the house even with the rest of the stuff in the box. Hell, I even took it outside and pretended to shoot planes down (WARNING: DO NOT ATTEMPT TODAY). Now, at the



time, my family only had one TV (a 21-inch Magnavox with wood paneling), so getting any game time at all was a win, but for my parents to agree to hook the Super Scope up, that was an EVENT. God knows I probably gave myself eye strain trying to squint through the eyepiece and the tiny eye-of-the-needle sized front sight, tired my arms out holding the damned thing for hours on end, and had to remember to always aim a little below and to the right because we could never figure out how to calibrate it perfectly, but I didn't care. The Super Scope was my own personal Lawgiver . . . *Super Scope 6* is a very obvious tech demo . . . That being said, it's actually quite good, as far as pack-in games go . . . Graphics and sound are pretty solid all across the board here . . . There's not a lot of variety in the actual gameplay besides point and shoot, but there's enough little quirks to make it not feel like one game with six different coats of paint, and for a short burst of fun, you could do a lot worse." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

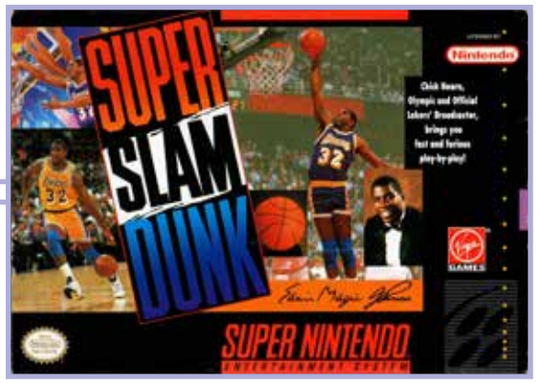
Insider Insight:
Growing up with a Sega Master System and a Nintendo NES, I became a big fan of light gun games. Zapper titles played a big role in my life because they were easy and everyone in my family could play them. When the Super Nintendo came out, I was upset that there was no light gun with the console. I got an SNES anyway, and my mom and dad did not like it because they claimed that it had "too many buttons" and was way too complicated.

A few years into the life of my Super Nintendo I saw a commercial for the Super Scope; a strange-looking device that looked more like a "light bazooka" than a standard light gun. The commercial showed off six games, and I knew I had to have it. When my birthday arrived later that year, I convinced my parents the Super Scope was worth fifty bucks because it came with *Super Scope 6*, a cartridge containing six games. Happy birthday, indeed.

Later that year my cousins came up from Virginia for Thanksgiving, and they thought the Super Scope was the coolest thing. It was probably the only video game blaster they did not own. We played *Super Scope 6* all day long and probably went through a couple dozen double-A batteries. My younger cousin and I enjoyed the three Lazer Blazer games because they were action packed, and because Mario would occasionally appear, riding on a missile while being chased by a Koopa Troopa. My two older cousins preferred the Blastris games because they were more into the puzzle genre. Between the four of us we played all six games over and over again. Great times! – Raymond Fix

Super Slam Dunk

Publisher: Virgin Interactive Entertainment.
Developer: Park Place Productions.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



Announced by legendary Chick Hearn, with in-game basketball tips and advice by Lakers great Magic Johnson (shown digitized), *Super Slam Dunk* has an air of realism. Despite its lack of actual NBA team names, cities and team colors are accurate for the time. Certain sound effects are taken from actual NBA games, the players and the court look nice, and three gameplay modes are available: Exhibition, All-Star, and Playoff, in which eight teams compete to win the championship. There are twenty-seven fictional teams based on real cities and one all-star team. You can turn fouls and music on or off and select how many minutes are in each quarter: 2, 5, 8, or 12.

Far less impressive than the presentation is the actual gameplay, which is plagued by sluggish controls, slow players, floating passes, and disorienting camera movement. Instead of a traditional horizontal display, the view of the court is from a perspective looking toward the basket. When the ball changes possession, the court rotates abruptly to show the opposite basket. This feature, which evokes *Dick Vitale's "Awesome Baby" College Hoops* for the Genesis, is unusual, but not in a good way. In Japan the game is called *Magic Johnson no Super Slam Dunk* (*Magic Johnson's Super Slam Dunk*).

Notable Quotable:

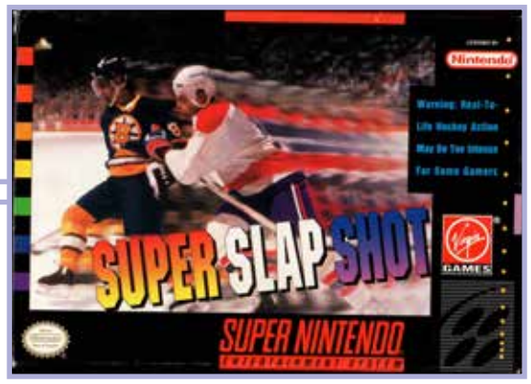
"Perhaps there actually are good sports games on the SNES. Unfortunately, this isn't it. The gameplay just isn't very solid, and with all of the great basketball games available on the Genesis, there isn't much reason to play this one." – *Video Game Bible, 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

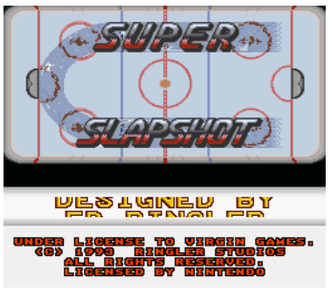
Notable Quotable:

"This game just doesn't have the legs to stand up against similar carts in the field. Although the gameplay does possess the most necessary elements of a basketball game, much of the detail (not to mention challenge in the versus computer mode) and finesse of basketball just can't be found." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1992)

Super Slap Shot

Publisher: Virgin Games.
Developer: Ringler Studios.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.





Endorsed by Gordie "Mr. Hockey" Howe, *Super Slap Shot* is a fast, chaotic game with four modes of play, including a Shootout practice mode. In Fighting mode gamers practice one-on-one brawls. Each player has four types of punches: jab, roundhouse, uppercut, and low blow, along with the ability to duck, cover up, and grab. In both the Exhibition and Tournament modes, each player selects a team for head-to-head hockey. The elevated view is from the side, and the action scrolls horizontally to follow the puck. If the ref sees you slash, hold, or trip, you will get time in the penalty box.

Fatigue, pro rules, and in-game fighting can be turned on or off, and you can make the referees fair, tough, or blind, the last of whom call no penalties other than delay of game and fighting. Other options and features in this game include body checks, slap shots (of course), crowd noise (booing, cheering, and clapping), auto and manual control (in the former you automatically control the player with the puck or the last skater to touch the puck), fourteen pages of stats to view between periods, and International Olympic and NHL city teams. There are thirty-two teams in all—each rated according to shot, passing, defense, power, speed, and goalie—but there is no league licensing, meaning no team logos nor mascots are used. Real players are also absent.

Notable Quotable:

"Another 'Super' sports title from Virgin, *Super Slap Shot* isn't very 'super' at all. Stick to *NHLPA Hockey 93* on your Genesis." – *Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Slap Shot* was made by the same people who made *Mario Lemieux Hockey* for Sega Genesis, so the feel of the controls and the viewpoint are very similar . . . This is a pretty fun game . . . not bad." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Super Smash T.V.

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Non-Scrolling Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

The year is 1999, and blood and violence reign supreme on the boob tube. America's favorite game show is *Smash T.V.*, and you (or you and a friend in simultaneous two-player mode) are its biggest star. Armed with a machine gun, you must run for your life in a series of closed arenas, blowing away baseball bat-wielding gangs, laser-firing orbs, exploding tin soldiers, and other killers bent on your destruction. Along the way you will pick up such prizes as money and gold bricks—be careful, though, they may be sitting on top of a hidden land mine. You will also find grenade launchers, photon guns, missile launchers, and other weapons. At the end of each of the four rounds of play a boss awaits: Mutoid Man, Scarface, Cobra Head, or The Game Show Host With The Most. Regular machine gun fire will not work on them, so you must use your special firepower.

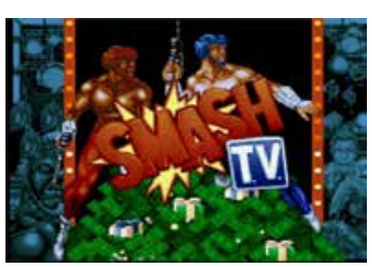
Super Smash T.V., which is similar thematically to Stephen King's novel *The Running Man* (1982), is a near-flawless reproduction of the dazzling quarter guzzler *Smash T.V.* (1990), which was created by Eugene Jarvis and Mark Turmell for Williams. It delivers everything you could want in a run-for-your-life shooter, as hordes of bad guys constantly attack on all fronts. The four face buttons on the SNES controller substitute nicely for the arcade game's second joystick, which lets you fire while moving with the other joystick. In this way and others, the action evokes Jarvis' *Robotron: 2084*. The SNES port is superior to its Genesis counterpart, especially the controls. The NES version, which lacked "Super" in the title, has smaller characters and items and scratchy sounding gunfire and voice effects. Also released for the Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:

"The NES [version] was the best game of its type on that machine, and Acclaim have done it again on the Super Nintendo to provide the most awesome home arcade blaster yet seen. If you own a Super Nintendo and you like your action fast and furious, you'd have to be a dribbling loony to pass up *Smash T.V.* Buy this cart and tell all your jealous mates you've got the arcade machine in your bedroom, because that's basically what this is. Buy it!" – *Computer and Video Games* (May 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"This one's pretty open-and-shut. If you enjoyed *Smash T.V.* in the arcades, then this was the king of the '90s home ports. It's the best choice if you have no way to play the original. If you simply like the sound of the idea, then it's probably not worth tracking down. Every room is essentially the same, every level is essentially the same, every moment—while sometimes chaotic and fun—is essentially the same. Gets old too quickly for a serious investment of time or money." – Just Games Retro (just-gamesretro.com)



Insider Insight:

While I was working at Atari Games/Tengen, I had access to the *Smash T.V.* arcade game outside my cubicle. I spent my break time playing it. It was one of my favorite arcade games, and it happened to be co-created by a friend of mine named Mark Turmell, who has always designed great games.

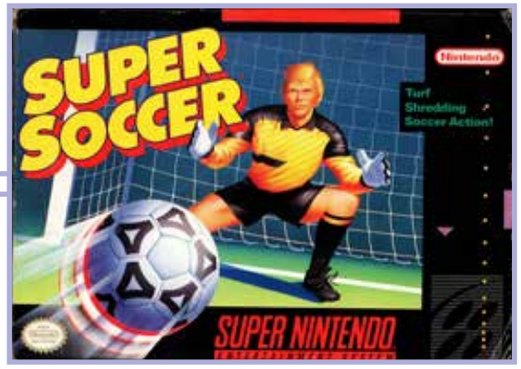
When the Super Nintendo version of the game came out, I could not wait to see how well the game converted over to the console. I bought the game and played the heck out of it—it was amazing! The port had tons of objects flying all over the place. All of the enemies and bosses played so well it really felt like I was playing the arcade version! When I played the game for the first time at home and got to the first boss in the game I said to my wife, "Check out Mutoid Man." She completely cracked up at his name, the way he looked, his animation, and the funny sounds he made.

While playing the game, you pick up money and prizes from room to room. After defeating each boss, the game tallies up all of the money and prizes you have collected in all of the rooms leading up to the boss. Depending on how much stuff I collected, I would be waiting for what felt like a few minutes. I would take this time to drink some coffee and do a bunch of jumping jacks until the tally ended and the next round started—my goofy way of getting exercise.

When we would go visit a friend of ours who also had *Super Smash T.V.*, my wife would be reading something while he and I would play two-player mode. It was always fun to cooperatively share the power-ups and extra life icons that would appear as we got ready to go against the next boss. In the background I would always hear my wife laughing when we would come up against Mutoid Man. – Steve Woita

Super Soccer

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Human Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



Super Soccer lacks a professional soccer license, but it plays a pretty mean game of football (as Brits and others call the sport). Exhibition mode lets you play against the computer or a human opponent. Or you can team up against the computer. In Tournament mode, you (or you and a friend) select a team and compete against fifteen other squads for the world championship. The camera gives an elevated vertical view of the field, which works well in following the fast-paced action. Each player looks like he was cloned from the same generic, brown-haired white guy, but the game has a nice look overall and includes cheering crowds and post-goal animations—the goalie being consoled by a teammate is fairly amusing.

In-game music—differing for each team—plays throughout. The controls work well and include throw-ins, goal kicks, corner kicks, penalty kicks, headers, bicycle kicks, slide tackles, and shoulder charges, the last of which sometimes results in a foul called by the referee. Eight selectable formations are available, as are auto and manual goalie control. The game was first released in Japan in 1991, as *Super Formation Soccer*.

Notable Quotable:
"Shoulder-shattering barges, leg-biting sliding tackles, and an abundance of curly permed Neanderthals make this the most crucial cart on the market!" – *N-Force* (June 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"I Like it! It uses the 3D chip to perform some jaw-dropping effects and you can run in and out of the screen at will. The gameplay has a couple of minor faults, but these don't really detract from the overall effect. The music is great and some of the sound effects are a bit special. A cracking little game." – *Computer and Video Games* (February 1992)

Insider Insight:
I do not like *Sensible Soccer*, I don't like *FIFA*, I don't like *International Superstar Soccer*, and I don't like *Pro Evo* or any other soccer game. And it is all because of *Super Soccer*. My brother and I discovered it while visiting a friend's house, where we all took turns having two-player matches, and I later borrowed his cartridge. A few months later we found a boxed copy at a flea market for five bucks, and from then on it was our default multiplayer sports title (*NBA Jam* also got some time in). We loved the game, and while we tried every other soccer title released in subsequent years, we would usually abandon them after a few minutes due to irritating controls (we agree that current gen titles are completely unplayable).

Super Soccer was big, bright, and had an awesome pop rock soundtrack with signature tunes for every team. More importantly, it was the easiest soccer game to get into, even more so than fan-favorite *Sensible Soccer*! We learned it in less than a minute, but it took us months to master and take Argentina all the way to the Nintendo Team finals. It replicated the sport about as realistically as foosball, but it was instantaneously fun.

Twenty years after first playing *Super Soccer* I found myself in Japan, interviewing Ryoji Amano and Masatoshi Mitori, the original masterminds behind the *Super Soccer* series. Life had come full circle, and along

Super Soccer

with my many questions I was able to thank them, revealing that even two decades later it is still the only soccer game my brother and I play. – John Szczepaniak

Insider Insight:
Super Soccer was the first game that I played in front of my parents in an attempt to convince them that video games are a valid form of entertainment and that they should let me play them in peace. My parents did not understand Nintendo, but they understood soccer—I thought I could make them cross this cultural bridge. We are from Ecuador—a small, overlooked, and often forgotten country. I thought that by showing them the South American teams in the game they would feel some familiarity. If you watched soccer in the '90s, then you would be aware of the soccer powerhouses of Argentina and Brazil. These were teams we had enjoyed watching on TV, and I was sure they would be excited to see representations of their favorite players in a game. They were not. My claims of "It's just like soccer!" backfired as they countered with "Go play real soccer outside."

I ended up playing *Super Soccer* alone most of the time, and no matter what team I chose, I was bad at it. I could not compete with the AI. I did not have a game plan or strategy because I never had enough time with the ball. I spent most of the game running up to the goal and shooting right into the keeper because I had trouble passing the ball without it getting intercepted. That goalkeeper had amazing AI: shoot . . . block; corner . . . block; header . . . block. I would even attempt to pull the keeper out of the box by baiting him with the ball, but I would always fall short.

One day, in a move of desperation, I lobbed the ball toward the goal from about midfield. The ball wasn't on track to go in, but I noticed that the keeper had a late jump, and he could not clear the edge of the post because he was jumping from the center. I saw my opening. I lined my player's position directly with the goal post and I launched the ball straight toward the goal. As predicted, the keeper jumped but did not have the reach to block the ball. GOAL! – Juan Vaca

Super Soccer Champ

Publisher: Taito.
Developer: Taito.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

A nice port of Taito's 1990 *Football Champ* arcade game, *Super Soccer Champ* lets players select from eight teams: Brazil, U.S.A., France, Argentina, Holland, England, Italy, and the Federal Republic of Germany (a.k.a. FRG, or West Germany). There are also eight controllable players from which to choose. After making your selections you will face another country in a four-minute game. If you win, you will play the next, more difficult team, sort of like a fighting game setup. There are no season modes, but there are options for two-player cooperative and competitive action. You can also practice penalty kicks.

In addition to such moves as passes, volleys, goal shots, and overhead kicks, you can punch, pull, shoulder-charge, and slide tackle. A referee is on hand to call fouls, but only if he sees you commit the infraction. The tilted, top-down action scrolls horizontally (and vertically to a lesser degree) to follow the ball. A small radar at the top of the screen shows the entire field. After a goal is scored the team celebrates like in the arcade game, but there are some missing touches, such as cameramen positioned by each goal. Known as *Hat Trick Hero* in Japan and *Euro Football Champ* in Europe.

Notable Quotable:

"This cart offers a solid but uneventful game of soccer. The scrolling is OK, and the gameplay is decent. The characters could have been a little more detailed and the sounds are average. If you're looking for a good soccer game that gives you the basics and nothing more, you've found it. Another average sports title for SNES." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"Each game is only four minutes each, and upon successfully beating a team you are immediately thrown into battle with a second, more difficult club to face. This is basic arcade game structure, and the fact that this is the real meat of *Super Soccer Champ* might turn off some players. There's no season mode, just exhibitions. But that's fine with me . . . Opponents are challenging but not impossible, and my teammates were always roughly where I wanted them to be when I was passing up the field to make a run for the goal. My goalie even made some clutch saves, which I'm not used to in soccer games. Even though it's about as deep as a puddle, *Super Soccer Champ* held my interest." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Super Solitaire

Publisher: Extreme Entertainment Group.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Card Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Super Solitaire lets players select from twelve different versions of the popular card game: Klondike, Free Cell, Golf, Cruel, Pyramid, Stonewall, Dozen't Matter, Aces Up, Florentine, Poker, Canfield, and Scorpion. The strategy in most of the variations involves placing cards in descending and/or ascending order, with the objective being to move the cards to specific piles. Pyramid has players clearing cards by making matches that add up to thirteen, while Poker has gamers creating five poker hands to achieve the highest score possible.

To control the game you guide a pointer around the screen, clicking on the cards you want to select and move. You will also click on a drawdown menu and select such functions as re-deal, start over, undo, abandon, code, and new game. There is also a drawdown selection menu for game, help, variations, options, and about. You can play a single game or enter a tournament, and the game is compatible with the Super NES Mouse. Unlike *Solitaire* for the NES (an unlicensed game from American Video Entertainment) *Super Solitaire* has themed backgrounds, both realistic and cartoonish. There are also several card back designs, and you can select from five languages.

Notable Quotable:
"There's enough variety in the games to keep an intermediate gamer busy, the graphics are nice, and you can change the backgrounds. The music is easy on the ears, and if this sounds like an afternoon well spent to you, then you'll thoroughly enjoy *Super Solitaire*." – *GamePro* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"This came out before the advent of a computer in every house and smartphones in every pocket, so maybe you had to work a little harder for your digital solitaire fix back then, but I still can't fathom the idea of someone plunking down $59.99 (!) in 1994 dollars (!!) . . . I do not believe that every game is actually winnable . . . you will sometimes get layouts that are just mathematically impossible to complete . . . Also, there are certain games (Aces Up shoots to mind, especially) that are pretty much entirely dictated by pure dumb luck . . . good for what it is . . . It does exactly what it says on the box, and does it well for all intents and purposes, which is always admirable." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Super Star Wars

Publisher: JVC Musical Industries.
Developer: LucasArts Game Team/Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

One of the better licensed titles of the 16-bit era, this game recreates the look, feel, and sound of *Star Wars* (1977)—one of the most iconic films of all time—incredibly well (even though the story is somewhat different). You begin the game as farm boy-turned-freedom fighter Luke Skywalker, who can run, jump, duck, slide, and do super jumps. Luke is armed with a blaster and lightsaber for battling drogs, womp rats, sandworms, Jawas, Sand People, Storm Troopers, and other enemies he will encounter, including such bosses as the Lava Beast Jawenko and the Sarlacc Pit Monster. By grabbing power-ups Luke can upgrade his gun to a flame blaster, proton seeker (energy protons follow the enemy), rapid ion gun, or plasma wave blaster. Other helpful items include plasma shields, thermal detonators, health hearts, time icons, health swords (for increasing your health bar), and extra lives.

Once you have found your pals Chewbacca and Han Solo you can select them at the beginning of each level. Han can't slide like Luke and Chewie, but he can roll, and only Luke uses a lightsaber. At certain points in the game you will pilot a land speeder and an X-Wing Fighter in shooter levels. You view the Land Speeder action from behind and the X-Wing Fighter gameplay from behind and from inside the cockpit. The game features such platforming staples as riding moving platforms, jumping over flames, dodging falling stalactites, and hopping on platforms that quickly go away. There are fourteen levels of play: Dune Sea, Tatooine I, Outside the Sandcrawler, Inside the Sandcrawler, Land of the Sand People, Tatooine II, Mos Eisley, Cantina Fight, Escape from Mos Eisley, Death Star Bay, Rescue the Princess, Tractor Beam, Death Star Attack, and Trench Battle.

Certain key scenes from the film are missing, such as the trash compactor episode and the escape from the Death Star via the Millennium Falcon. Also, slowdown rears its ugly head, there is no save feature, and Princess Leia is not a playable character. Regardless, the game is excellent, thanks in part to cool cutscenes, excellent rotation and scaling effects, a CD-quality musical score, and authentic sounding (if sparse) voice effects. Best of all gameplay, in both the vehicle and platforming scenes, is rock solid. Difficulty levels include easy, brave, and Jedi.

Memories: I have been a big *Star Wars* fan since I saw the original film in the theater in 1977, so picking up *Super Star Wars* shortly after it came out was a no-brainer, especially after I read the positive reviews. I loved the game, but grew frustrated, since I kept losing a few levels in and had to keep starting over from the very beginning. Long before the internet became mainstream, I remember finding the *Super Star Wars* hint guide at Waldenbooks and writing down helpful cheat codes (I was too cheap to actually purchase the book). Even so I never beat the game, but I had a great time trying and still play it from time to time.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Star Wars* makes full potential of its license, and the end result is the best-looking, most impressive-sounding and playable movie tie-in ever seen on the Super NES." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"This is an average 2D action game with frustrating bosses, decent music, and horrible vehicle levels. I can't fully recommend this game. If you can find it for under $10, then pick it up and enjoy it for an afternoon—but this is not the quintessential *Star Wars* game retro gamers should be playing. *Super Empire Strikes Back* and *Super Return of the Jedi* are much more fun than this one." – Retrogame Man (retrogameman.com)

Super Star Wars

Notable Quotable:

"The game is a lightning-fast, but fairly standard action scroller . . . You probably won't remember the scene where Chewbacca had to shoot his way out of a cantina full of hostile aliens, or the one where Luke had to carve up a giant sandworm with his lightsaber, but you'll at least recognize the deserts of Tatooine and the interior hallways of the Death Star when the mayhem rolls through . . . It scrolls smoothly, tracks your jumping and shooting with precision, and throws in plenty of angry creatures on screen at the same time . . . Graphically, the game is sharp and impressive . . . Backgrounds look great, and scroll independently of the foreground action. Detail on the sand dunes of the early levels contrasts well with a beautiful blue sky. Later Death Star levels are slightly less impressive, with a lot of reuse of textures and colors, but I suppose that is fitting with the technological coldness of the film's sets . . . This game is a great introduction to what the series will become, and the most easy-going fun of the three." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Insider Insight:

I am such a good big brother. It was Christmas 1994, and I knew what my sister wanted more than anything else—a Super Nintendo with the newly packed-in *Donkey Kong Country*. So what if it wasn't on her wish list? It was obviously what she wanted. Surely I had no interest in it myself whatsoever. None.

Okay, maybe a little bit . . .

I will acknowledge the remote possibility that I—as a huge *Star Wars* fan at a time when the franchise was just starting to get its legs back—was also perhaps microscopically interested in trying out the whole new trilogy of *Super Star Wars* games that had been released over the past two years. I may have even drooled a bit at the sight of the first game adorning the November 1992 cover of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. And, as luck would have it, that particular game was also on the nonexistent list Brittany had provided to me in my head—so she would be getting that, too. A previously played version from Blockbuster, where I was working at the time.

I was the last to bed on Christmas Eve—Britt was getting this from Santa, and not even Mr. Claus knew he was giving it to her. After everyone in my family had retired, I went so far as to hook up the system so that *DKC*'s attract mode would greet her once she had made the trek downstairs.

But I couldn't just hook it up and leave it, right? I had to make sure both games were fully functional, right? Or at least *Super Star Wars*. And that would require staying up another couple hours to play. Can't be too careful. After defeating a strangely off-brand Sarlacc Pit and slaughtering droves of Jawas (they had it coming, right?), I finally hit the hay around 3:00 a.m.

Brittany loved her new SNES—*Super Star Wars* included—and would play it for several years to come. I might have tried it out a few times myself. Maybe even a little more than she did. Or a lot more. Possibly.
– Chris Baker

Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

Publisher: JVC Musical Industries.
Developer: LucasArts Game Team/Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

The sequel to *Super Star Wars*, *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* is based on the classic movie *The Empire Strikes Back*, which as most everyone reading this surely knows, is the 1980 sequel to the original *Star Wars*. Once again, the score, voice effects, graphics, and action scenarios are relatively faithful to the film, with some flourishes thrown in to account for the fact that this is a game and not a movie.

You begin as Luke Skywalker (on foot and on your Tauntaun), who wields a blaster and lightsaber (which can block and do high and low attacks) to battle creatures, including the Wampa Ice Beast, through the icy caves and plains of Hoth. You can run, jump, duck, slide, and do super jumps, and you can grab power-ups to change your gun to a flame blaster, proton seeker, rapid ion gun, or plasma wave blaster. Plasma shields, thermal detonators, health hearts and swords, and extra lives return from the previous game, but now Luke can grab Force power-ups that let him float, freeze enemies, become invisible, use mind control (so enemies do not attack), deflect enemy shots, slow down enemies and their bullets, and wield a throwable super lightsaber. Then Luke will fly his snowspeeder (viewed from behind) to defend the Rebel base against advancing Imperial AT-AT Walkers.

Other scenarios include battling through Rebel's Echo Base as Han Solo to reach the Millennium Falcon (viewed from inside the cockpit) and escape from the Emperor's Attack; shooting through an asteroid field while piloting the Falcon; travelling to Degobah as Luke to learn the ways of the Force from Yoda; going to Cloud City as Han or Chewbacca to find Lando Calrissian; traveling to Cloud City as Luke to confront Darth Vader; piloting an X-Wing Fighter; and more. In the first-person vehicle shooter stages, you must defeat a certain number of enemies before advancing to the next stage. There is even some side-scrolling shooter action, along with such typical activities as riding on elevators and moving platforms. When on foot Han and Chewie handle similar to Luke, but Han can roll, while Chewie can do a Kashyyykian spin attack.

There are many enemies to battle in this game, including Hoth hogs, Ugnaughts, bounty hunters, Snow Troopers, and such Super Bosses as an Imperial Probe Droid, Swamp Creature Habogad, AT-ST, and C-A-T (Combat Attack Transport). Unlike *Super Star Wars*, *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* features passwords for saving progress, but this is still a very difficult game, thanks in part to blind jumps and cheap hits from off-screen enemies. Three difficulty levels are available: easy, brave, and Jedi.

Memories: Even though I am a big *Star Wars* fan and loved *Super Star Wars*, I did not pick up *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* or *Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* when they first came out, for reasons that now escape me. At some point after they were re-released with black-and-white instruction manuals and "The Classic Hit Available Once Again" text on the front of the boxes, I found stacks of them on clearance at my local Toys "R" Us for just $5 each. Naturally I picked up one of each for my collection, and it even occurred to me that I should grab a few extras because they were so darned cheap. Maybe I could sell or trade them for some other games in the future. But this was before Facebook, before I was into online auctions, before retro video game conventions, and before video games were considered collectible, so I ended up just buying one of each. At least I still have those complete in the package, but it sure would be nice to have some extra factory sealed copies to sell at shows.

Notable Quotable:
"Each level manages to deliver basically non-stop action at a hectic and fun pace . . . good, but probably not as great as you recall." – *Game Informer* (May 2006)

Notable Quotable:
"I will admit that I thought that there was no way that any game could match the original, but LucasArts comes through once again

Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back

with this excellent sequel. There are many new scenes and backgrounds, and the excellent play control was maintained. There are very few games of this caliber available, so this is not one to let slip by." – *Game Zero* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"It follows the same level-boss format and in so doing it quickly loses its appeal . . . This version's rock hard. If you liked the original—and many of you did—then *Super Empire Strikes Back* is worth a look, but don't expect any radical changes. The story has moved on, but the play mechanics remain the same, and there's still that irritating slowdown when the screen starts to get busy." – *Edge* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"While I really enjoyed the movie, I just couldn't find myself enjoying this game very much. The control needs more work

and seems sloppy (even when not standing on ice) and the game is just plain HARD! You never really get a chance to defend yourself because everything is attacking you all at once. On the plus side, the music is very good and follows the theme of the movie correctly. Now, about that difficulty . . . " – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1993)

Insider Insight:
Just as *The Empire Strikes Back* is the darkest of the original *Star Wars* movies, so too will I always see its SNES game counterpart as the darkest *Super Star Wars* title. In the film this is achieved through a string of Imperial victories, capped with the complete incapacitation of Han and perhaps the most iconic twist in cinema history. In the game, well . . . IT'S JUST SO FREAKING HARD!!!!

Super Star Wars and *Super Return of the Jedi* were absolutely no slouches when it came to difficulty, but at least they were beatable. *Empire*, though? BRUTAL!!! I feel like I had a Wampa slap me across the face and drag me to his ice cave on Hoth just thinking about it. I guess that is appropriate, since I am not sure I ever made it past him in the game.

I don't remember exactly how far I made it legitimately, but the existence of cheat codes is the only reason I have ever seen anything past Hoth. And the difficulty sure doesn't let up from there. But outside of being harder than detaching a hungry Mynock from the Millennium Falcon's power cables? I love it! I love it all.

Like the rest of the trilogy, it combines my favorite movies with some of the 16-bit era's most top-notch production values—especially when it comes to sound and music. "The Imperial March" of *Super Empire Strikes Back* even surpasses the quality of "The Imperial March" of the PC CD-ROM version of *TIE Fighter* released one year later. It is that good.

There is even a cool remix of "The Imperial March" on the GAME OVER screen. You will get to know it quite well. – Chris Baker

Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi

Publisher: JVC Musical Industries.
Developer: LucasArts Game Team/Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Unlike the first two games in the series, *Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* lets gamers play as Princess Leia Organa. Not only that, you can control her as she wears her Boushi garb, Rebel uniform, or even her famed slave girl bikini. Leia has a twirl/spin move (hold down the A button for a longer spin), and she can wield a whip, a staff, and a blaster. While wearing the bikini or the Boushi costume she can charge and unleash an energy beam. You can also control the Ewok Wicket for the first time. He brandishes a bow and arrow.

Before most levels you will be asked which character you want to embark on the mission, including Luke, who wields a lightsaber and can unleash the following Force powers: Force saber (control your lightsaber in flight), deflect (rebound enemy shots back at them), freeze (freezes all on-screen enemies), vanish (become invisible), and heal (restores your health). Chewbacca, who can do a fireball spin, and Han Solo, who throws bombs, each carry a blaster. Everyone but Luke can ignite thermal detonators, and each character can do standard platform jumping.

You will search for Han Solo, race through the wasteland of Tatooine, free Solo from the evil clutches of Jabba the Hutt, battle Jabba and try to get off his sail barge before it explodes, battle Bib Fortuna, destroy the Death Star's shield generator on the forest moon of Endor, initiate a surface attack on the Death Star, confront Darth Vader and the Emperor, and much more. Depending on the level, you will be on foot (the platforming, enemy shooting action remains similar to the first two games) or you will cruise in a landspeeder (viewed from behind; avoid rocks, vault over gaps), pilot the Millennium Falcon (gallery shooting and inside a tunnel), or drive a speeder bike (viewed from behind; shoot and dodge other bikers). Vehicle stages utilize Mode 7 effects. There are nineteen levels in all. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:

"The Mode 7 levels are just incredible . . . *Super Return of the Jedi* is a blast even if you're not a fan of the *Star Wars* series." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

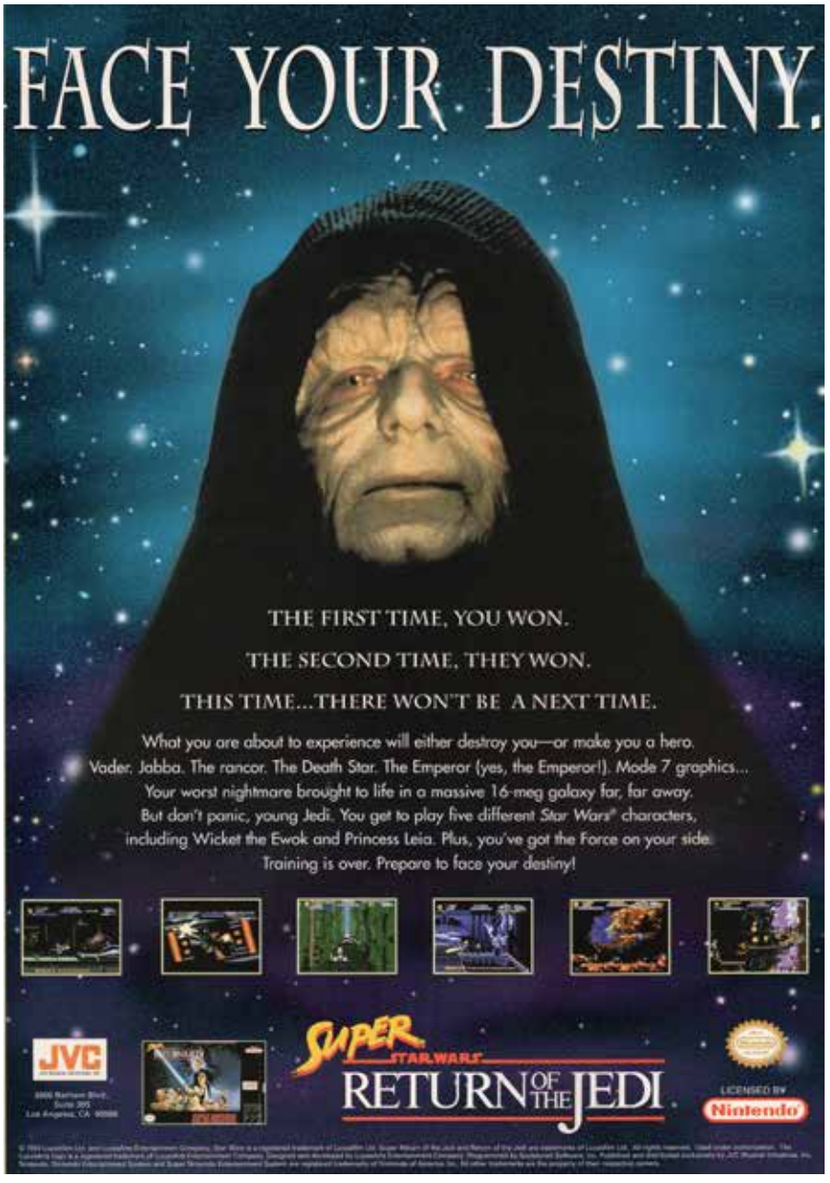
"This game looks spectacular. It's one of the best-looking SNES games, period. The lighting effects look awesome, especially when you fight the rancor . . . They did a really nice job of balancing the range of your second jump with the platforming layout. This is still a really tough platformer with some tricky jumps, but it actually feels doable this time around . . . the best of the three because it feels a lot more balanced . . . definitely worth checking out today." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"LucasArts seemed to get everything right in *Super Return of the Jedi*. The gameplay hasn't changed much since *Super Star Wars*, but *Jedi* is the most forgiving of the three games. In fact, it's almost *easy* compared to *Em-*

Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi

pire . . . Jedi's graphics and attention to detail are stunning. As an example, Jabba's Gamorrean guards actually have saliva dripping from their mouths! The stage backdrops, particularly those set in the lush forests of Endor, look gorgeous . . . the lightsaber block plays an instrumental role in defeating Vader, and ultimately the Emperor . . . floating icons will earn you a bonus life should you collect 100 of them. This adds a fun *Super Mario Bros.* flavor to the game . . . does a nice job of following the storyline of the film, skillfully building to the exciting finale." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)



Insider Insight:

The print ad for *Super Star Wars: Return of the Jedi* was absolutely magical. Imagine flipping through *GamePro*, then coming across a beautiful spread that is mostly just white space and one glorious image spanning both pages—a lightsaber. In 1994, *Star Wars* was in the nascent stages of reestablishing its hold on pop culture, so it wasn't absolutely everywhere like it has been since the Special Edition movies came out. So seeing such iconic imagery centered across two pages was an unforgettable moment in this young geek's long history of paging through gaming magazines.

I would not actually play it for probably another year, only to find it continued the hallmarks of the previous two *Super Star Wars* games, offering up nonstop action sequences set to a familiar backdrop replete with stuff that absolutely did not happen in the films. It wastes no time in this aspect either, with your first mission being to navigate a never-before-seen landspeeder through the bottomless pits of Tatooine (wha? . . .) en route to Jabba's Palace . . . where you eventually take on an entire level in Leia's gold bikini—something I quite enjoyed at age eighteen. One level even follows Wicket through what must be a tumultuous typical day on Endor—I have a newfound respect for daily Ewok life after playing this game.

And I will never forget one of my true all-time gaming triumphs—beating that final level. A successful run of escaping the Death Star in the Millennium Falcon takes about two and a half minutes—I know I spent at least that many hours accomplishing the feat. I remember failing time and time again one summer afternoon in 1995, until that one magic moment when the flames did not overcome me.

It was time to listen to some chiptune "Yubnub"—I can think of no greater reward. – Chris Baker

Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–8 players (2-player simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

For two years twelve fighters reigned supreme, battling each other in the World Tournament. Now there are four New Challengers, each with unique special moves, and each with a variety of throws, holds, crouches, and light, medium, and hard punches, and kicks. Newcomers include kung fu expert Fei Long (rekka ken, rising dragon kick), British intelligence agent Cammy (front kick, cannon drill, spinning knuckle), Jamaican kickboxer Dee Jay (hyper fist, max out, double dread kick), and Native American wrestler Thunder Hawk (the hawk, thunderstrike, storm hammer).

As such, the game features all sixteen combatants from Capcom's 1993 coin-op game. The port also features new and expanded modes of play, along with returning modes. In Super Battle mode, you choose a fighter and try to defeat all the others to earn the right to battle M. Bison. V.S. Battle, which you can handicap, pits you head-to-head against a friend in a series of fights. Group Battle has you creating teams, while Tournament Battle lets up to eight players compete for the Street Fighter Championship. There is also a Time Challenge mode where you try to knock out your computer opponent as quickly as possible.

Options in *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers*—the third *SFII* game on the SNES—include difficulty, time limit, and stereo or monaural sound. The Sega Genesis version is similar, but does have a few differences, such as the addition of Score Challenge mode, where you test your skill at combinations while trying to knock out your computer-controlled opponent. The SNES game has better coloring and sound.

Fun Fact: Cammy is a playable character in the Dreamcast shooter *Cannon Spike*. The game also features Arthur from *Ghosts 'n Goblins* and Charlie from *Street Fighter Alpha*.

Notable Quotable:

"As much as I hate to do this, I cannot give this game an outstanding score. Why? It's simple. It's not worth buying *SFII* again, just for new characters and a couple of new options. Oh sure, the game plays as good, if not better, than *SFII Turbo*, and the four additional characters add a bit more challenge, but c'mon already, enough is enough." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Street Fighter II* arrived on the SNES with some controversy. While most publications swooned over the conversion, longtime *Street Fighter* loving advocate *EGM* was not nearly as impressed. This was shocking. Between 1991 to 1993 *EGM* might as well have called themselves 'Street Fighter Monthly,' thanks to their endless coverage and *Street Fighter* covers. It surprised us all when they doled out less than stellar ratings of 6, 7, 7 and 8." – RVGFanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Of the new challengers, Fei Long is a Bruce Lee look-alike, Cammy is a scantily clad British soldier, Dee Jay is a tall guy from the Caribbean, and T. Hawk is a huge American Indian in a sissy pink outfit . . . graphics have been tweaked from the previous game to look slightly more realistic, and the music has been remastered for better or worse. Most regard this as the ultimate *Street Fighter* game for the SNES." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:
In the same vein as "Who Shot J.R.?", it seemed that all of my friends and I wanted to know just who these new characters were in *Super Street Fighter II*. I still remember begging my mother and grandmother for a *GamePro* magazine subscription, just so I could be on top of the school cafeteria chatter about the game. The excitement and suspense behind this new *Street Fighter* title was palpable in 1993.

There are few times in my life when I was ever so excited for a video game. Even before it hit store shelves, and even before I plugged it into my SNES, I was fully immersed in the game, reading about it and talking about it with my friends.

When *Super Street Fighter II* finally came out that fall, my twelve-year-old brain was overwhelmed with just how good and polished it was. Sure, the new characters were the selling point, and they were awesome—from the mystical warrior Fei Long, to the ever-smiling Dee Jay, to the stoic T. Hawk, and of course, to Cammy, only the second female character in the series to that point—there was something for everyone in that regard.

But there was so much more. The franchise improved by leaps and bounds in terms of audio/visuals, and you could tell a ton of care and attention to detail went into what was essentially a turning point in fighting games. Few games united South Scranton Intermediate School gamers with the simple agreement that *Super Street Fighter II* had to be experienced to be believed. – Nick DeMarco

Super Strike Eagle

Publisher: MicroProse Software.
Developer: MicroProse Software.
Game Type: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Part of MicroProse's Strike Eagle series, *Super Strike Eagle* puts you in the cockpit of an F-15 fighter, using guns, missiles, electronic jammers, and bombs to wage war against such targets as airfields, boats, enemy fighters, nuclear power plants, chemical weapons factories, anti-air weapons, tanks, and terrorists camps. You will also land to refuel, repair, and rearm your fighter. Each mission includes mandatory and optional targets.

The view from inside the cockpit depicts airspace and your targeting reticule on the top half of the screen and the control panel of your fighter on the bottom half. When the action switches to a top-down view (as a result of you reaching mission critical targets), Mode 7 effects and faux 3D graphics take center stage as turning rotates the screen, and you can fly downward to get closer to your targets. Combat zones are divided into a day level and a night level. If you crash once it is game over; the flags at the United Nations building in New York are lowered to half mast and "Taps" will play. Your overall objective is to coerce rogue nations into joining the UN. Known in Japan as *F-15 Super Strike Eagle*.

Notable Quotable:

"Once you get used to it, I guarantee you it is quite a lot of fun . . . I would recommend getting a copy with a manual." – Retro Game On (www.retrogameon.com)

Notable Quotable:

"By today's standards, *Super Strike Eagle* is laughable. By the standards of 1993 when it was released, it was still laughable. It is a flight sim, and unfortunately not a very good one. *After Burner* on the SMS would be a better choice." – *Video Game Bible, 1985–2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

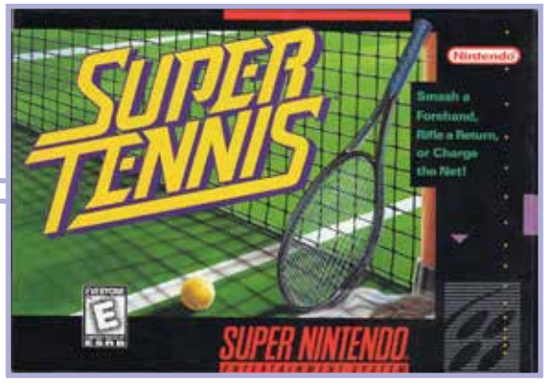
"Though it is impressive in a technical sense, playing *Super Strike Eagle* today is a painful experience . . . The only times the graphics let down is the first-person dogfighting missions, where the muddy visuals often blend in together . . . If it weren't for the targeting computer, I wouldn't be able to see enemy fighters most of the time. Also, it's easy to get turned around when entering one of these sorties and end up flying upside down and unable to figure out which way is up." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Notable Quotable:

"A fierce mix of action-packed combat, thought-provoking strategy, and four knock-out gameplay views . . . The animation is super slick, and the scenery is gorgeous . . . the sky's vibrant colors are great . . . You'll live and die by your ability to quickly comprehend the easy-to-read radar screen . . . The sound effects are excellent, particularly when you're hit by missiles or rattled by gunfire. The music has a catchy militaristic rock . . . mastering the game's crisp controls (which use every SNES button) will save your tail . . . *Strike Eagle* soars." – *GamePro* (February 1993)

Super Tennis

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Tokyo Shoseki.
Game Type: Sports/Tennis, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1991.



A fast, realistic sim of the popular racket sport, *Super Tennis* has options galore, including a variety of Singles and Doubles play, Tournament action (with twenty anime-style men and women to select from, each of varying strengths and weaknesses), and three types of court surfaces: hard, lawn, and clay. The ball bounces differently on each surface—similar to real tennis—and lobs, slices, smashes, and other strokes are realistically portrayed. You can hit the ball several ways, including putting spin on the ball (left, right, or topspin) and doing a light volley, a lob, and a regular swing. While serving you dribble, toss, and hit the ball (hard or soft).

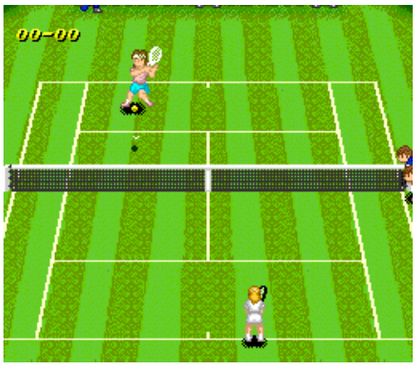
The graphics and sounds are solid for a first-generation Super NES game, passwords save tournament progress (winning games gives you points toward your ranking), and the two-player action is indeed super—you can team up with the computer against a friend and an AI player, or pair up with a friend against two computer players. Winning games adds to your point total, which goes toward your world ranking among thirty-two players. Listed #84 on IGN's list of "Top 100 Super Nintendo Games," this is easily the best tennis game for the system.

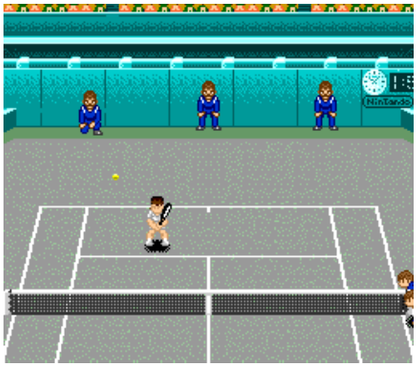
Notable Quotable:

"First of all, there's the quite breathtaking speed of the game: you have to be quick off the mark to return those rocket-hot serves and follow them up with an almost limitless variety of moves. Then there's the cutesy graphics and quite superb sound—so good you'd almost swear you were there! Above all there's the unbelievable tension generated by the game. It's hard to explain, but you've just GOT to win! You'll do anything to dust your opponent, even if that means throwing tantrums to put him off the game!" – *Computer and Video Games* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Tennis* offers plenty of bells and whistles, but its lackluster gameplay prevents it from greatness. The characters are rendered in a Japanese anime style, and the detailed courts come complete with ball boys and line judges. The oversized tennis ball is easy to follow, and pleasant music plays throughout the matches. The controls provide every shot you would need, including lobs, slices, and overhead smashes. Executing these shots is frustrating, however. You have to hit the button at exactly the right time (not when it's bouncing), and you can't swing while on the run. I was also annoyed by the constant faults on the serves . . . *Super Tennis* has some nice features, but its core gameplay could use some work." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)





Super Troll Islands

Publisher: American Softworks Corporation.
Developer: Millennium Interactive.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Remember those little plastic dolls with the wild, Don King-like hair? You can select between four of them to control in *Super Troll Islands*, an unusual platformer with running, jumping, swimming, and climbing, but a different type of objective. Instead of simply running through the game willy-nilly, players must walk on greyed-out platforms, ladders, and the like to fill the world with color (shades of *City Connection*, *Miner 2049er*, and *Q*bert*). Once you have colored in an entire area (cleared out the evil mist brought by the Evil Overlord, according to the storyline) a colorful background graphic is revealed, and it is on to the next area.

There are ten levels to explore, each busily populated by quirky, cartoonish enemies and things to pick up and throw as weapons, including cupcakes and custard pies. If you take too long to beat an area a cloud will stalk you. Each of the four trolls you control has a different ability. The pink-haired troll jumps high, while the orange-haired troll runs fast. The blue-haired troll can dive under water, while the green-haired troll can take an extra hit. The cute, colorful levels are filled with trees, grass, ladders, spiky pits, mushrooms, flowers, hills, castles, and more, including such wacky platforms as hotdog wienies on the ends of forks. There are also items to collect, such as fruit and stars. Enemies range from shoes to blobs, to jumping fireballs, to aliens, to sharks. The popular doll franchise was also licensed to the NES for *Trolls in Crazyland*.

Notable Quotable:
"The controls are ridiculously loose, and your troll will just slide around all over the place and jump too high for his own good . . . This is some 16-bit torture in its purest form." – CGR undertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"This is an interesting concept (turning black-and-white islands into color), but the incredibly fast speed at which you travel leads to many unintentional errors—like running into enemies!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1993)

Super Turrican

Publisher: Seika Corporation.
Developer: Factor 5.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Stardate 2751-11. As a brave fighter of the U.S.S. Freedom Force outfitted with a Turrican Assault Suit, you must help the people of Katakis, who have been enslaved by the "evil forces of The Machine." This sets the stage for *Super Turrican*, a rapid-fire platform shooter that has you blowing away alien creatures (some crawl, some hop, and some swim or fly), robots, bombs that fall from ceilings, spaceships, boss monsters, and other enemies through thirteen levels of play, including industrial areas, mountainous zones, an icy level, and a stage that looks as though it was designed by H. R. Giger (of *Alien* fame). You must also dodge flames, enemy bullets, laser beams, and other obstacles, along with jump over gaps and onto moving platforms, rolling snowballs, and the like.

You wield three types of upgradeable weapons in this *Contra*-like game: red, a spread shot that is effective in the open areas; blue, a laser good for destroying tough enemies; and yellow, a bounce shot that works well in caves, since the bullets rebound off walls. Plus, you can use a freeze beam, which freezes all the enemies but the big ones; and a smart line, which destroys almost anything in its way. Similar to Samus in *Metroid*, you can transform into an energy wheel, rolling along the ground, laying mines, and throwing bombs in the air. The game also evokes *Metroid* with its exploratory nature and non-linear elements. To find extra weapons and power-ups you can shoot hidden blocks. To complete a level, search for and find the exit signs until you find the final exit at the end of the level. Throughout the game you will collect diamonds (which give you points and extra lives), and at the end of each level the game will tell you how many you collected and how many were left.

Part of the Turrican series, which includes such games as *Turrican* (various), *Turrican II: The Final Fight* (various), and *Mega Turrican* (Genesis), *Super Turrican* for the SNES is quite a bit different than the game of the same name for the NES, which was a European release.

Notable Quotable:

"This was one of the early efforts from Factor 5, the team that would later bring us the phenomenal Rogue Squadron series. Unlike that *Star Wars* sim, the Turrican series had more in common with *Contra* and *Mega Man* than it did with any X-Wings. It's unfortunate that so few people recall this action-packed affair, since it pulled some fun ideas from a number of sources to emerge as an excellent side-scrolling shooter." – *Game Informer* (2006)

Notable Quotable:

"Developed by Factor 5 at the same time as *Mega Turrican*, *Super Turrican* for the SNES lacks the polish of the Genesis game, but yet it is an interesting one. It features a rearranged *Turrican 3* soundtrack optimized for the SNES' powerful sound chip . . . The gameplay is once again closer to the first two games: Gone is the plasma rope, replaced with a freeze beam, which is much closer in spirit to the original lightning whip, although it doesn't kill enemies; the always welcome power lines return, and even the invisible bonus boxes make a comeback, instead of the ugly chests of *Mega Turrican*, that couldn't even be used as stepping stones to find secrets . . . The beginning of the game is an amalgamation of the first worlds of *Turrican* I and II, whereas the last stage is directly taken from *Mega Turrican*'s penultimate world, the Alien one. More borrowings from past episodes follow throughout the game; the only stages that are really new are a sub-stage inside of a volcano and an ice world . . . The folks at Factor 5 apparently had a taste for British humor. The intro mentions a planet named Katakis—a reference to the Manfred Trenz shooter the company ported to the Amiga years before—but this planet is classified as 'Mostly Harmless.' This is the same phrase used to describe the planet Earth in Douglas Adams' *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*." – Sam Derboo and Carlo Savorelli (www.hardcoregaming101.net)

Insider Insight:
One of my all-time SNES favorites, *Super Turrican* could be considered somewhat of a cross between *Contra* and *Metroid*, in that it featured *Contra*-style run-and-gun action, but with a touch of free-roaming, non-linear *Metroid* level design. Plus, you could roll up into a ball like Samus. But why it really struck such a chord with me (no pun intended) was the music. The ultra catchy soundtrack developed a cult fan base, and composer Chris Huelsbeck later released a remastered orchestral version of it. *Super Turrican* was one of the first games to boast Dolby Surround sound—it just sounded amazing with your SNES hooked up to a stereo receiver.

The game was also a technical marvel, as developers Factor 5 put the SNES's Mode 7 effects to good use, with huge bosses that scaled and rotated. Sadly, the game was a tad on the short side. Factor 5 originally finished it as a 6 megabit cartridge, but was forced by the publisher to cut it to 4 megabits to save costs, ultimately creating a shortened patchwork of a game. But it still rocked regardless. – Sam Kennedy

Super Turrican 2

Publisher: Ocean Software.
Developer: Factor 5.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

In *Super Turrican 2*—a highly sought after game by collectors—you are the remaining survivor of the United Freedom Forces, and you must prevent The Machine from turning the devastated galaxy into their defensive stronghold. Clad in a Turrican Assault Suit, you must walk, duck, and jump your way through such levels as Dune World, Sand Planet, The Sewers, Pirate Attack, Jaws, and Space Ship, shooting a variety of enemies, including droids, sand leeches and snakes, cyborg hovercraft, and giant bosses. You will also ride an assortment of vehicles, including a desert dune buggy, a space motorcycle, and an underwater motojet.

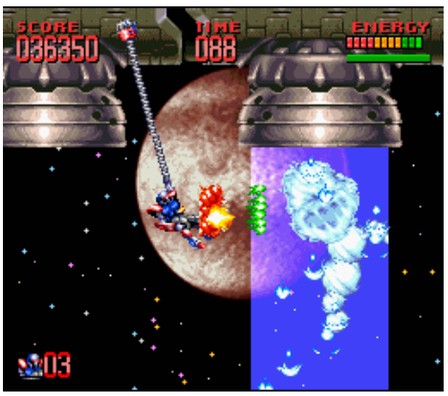
You can collect weapons throughout the game (four types of which are upgradeable), including spread rifle, laser, rebound laser (shots ricochet off walls and walkways), homing missiles, smart bombs, super bombs, and an energy wheel (which lets you roll along the ground, laying mines and throwing bombs in the air). The energy wheel makes you invincible, but you can only use it for a limited time (based on the green bar beneath your health meter). New to the series is a flamethrower weapon and your Assault Suit's *Bionic Commando*-like grappling arm, which is used for climbing walls, clinging to platforms, and grabbing otherwise out-of-reach items. *Super Turrican 2* was the last game in the series.

Notable Quotable:

"*Super Turrican 2* reminds me of the Super Famicom games of old. The SNES hardware is brought to its knees in this game, with special effects around every corner. The adventure is loaded with great play mechanics, flawless control, and incredible music. First *Mega Turrican* and now this! I'm really starting to like this guy!" – *GameFan Magazine* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"After many rehashes of graphics and elements, this game is built again from scratch. The Turrican Suit was completely redesigned with a much darker look . . . Stages became even more linear, though: all the emphasis is now on special stages where Turrican rides vehicles of any kind: from a desert dune buggy to space motorcycles, and even underwater motojets, all in a true Mode 7 heaven. But the best one is the return of Turrican's jetpack, used by Factor 5 to craft a stunning overhead shoot-em-up level that pays homage to the great *Axelay*, with its fantastic perspective distortion. Each of these stages plays wonderfully on their own, but sadly the result lacks of cohesion. When not riding any vehicle, chances are that the player just has to move mindlessly from left to right, shooting everything in the way. The only 'big' stage in the entire game is the second, and it pales compared to any of the mazes in the early titles. As a result of this very straightforward structure, the energy wheel has become pretty much useless, if not for self-defense purposes. No need to bother looking for hidden passages. Even more than *Mega Turrican*, the game is packed with sensational events and set-pieces, from a worm-riding stage (blessed with the best music in the game), to a spaceship so huge that it demands much use of the bionic arm (now even more reminiscent of *Bionic Commando*), to just about every single boss battle in the game. Never before have bosses been that spectacular in a Turrican game. They are all very challenging as well. The mood of the game is a lot darker than usual, as mediated through both the graphics and the music. The story is told with pre-rendered cutscenes that somehow manage to not look terribly outdated." – Sam Derboo and Carlo Savorelli (www.hardcoregaming101.net)



Insider Insight:
As a huge fan of the original *Super Turrican*, I had to hunt down the sequel online for my collection, and boy, was I glad I did just that a few years ago—it now fetches a couple hundred dollars on eBay. It is unclear whether Ocean Software actually released any copies in the US; popular assumption is that they did not have enough faith in it selling enough copies so they never put it out. In any case, it was hard enough to track down in the mid-'90s, and it is even harder to get hold of today. A version eventually made it to the Wii's Virtual Console, but then it got mysteriously yanked from the store. If you have a copy in any form consider yourself lucky. *Super Turrican 2* took what fans loved about the original—great run-and-gun, *Contra*-esque gameplay, sweet Mode 7 bosses, and super catchy tunes—and took everything up a notch. While I still prefer the original overall, this is a great shooter to have in your collection—if you can find it. – Sam Kennedy

Super Valis IV

Publisher: Atlus Software.
Developer: Telenet Japan.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The only *Valis* game produced for the SNES (previous editions appeared on the Genesis and Turbografx-16 CD), *Super Valis IV* is a port of *Valis IV* (PC Engine CD), but with missing animated cut scenes and only one playable character (as opposed to three—Amu and Asfal are absent). Gameplay is serviceable, though, with red-headed Lena running, jumping, hacking, slashing, and crouching (but not sliding) through seven mythology-inspired levels: Vecanti, Castle Vanity, Babylon, Valhalla, Crystal Pillar, Reddish Moon, and Gallagher.

To battle the various archers, knights, and other enemies she will encounter, Lena uses the short, *Strider*-esque Celestial Valis Sword given to her by Yuko Ahso, the former main protagonist of the series who has become the Goddess of Valia. Throughout the game you will come across sword power-ups, including Valis shot (a beam that shoots straight ahead), three-way beam, bomber (a huge missile that fires in front of you), homing (a missile that seeks out the nearest enemy), and searcher (a wolf's head that moves along the ground). You can also grab armor and health restoring hearts. The magic bar and items that increase hit points and magic points from previous games in the series are not in *Super Valis IV*.

Notable Quotable:

"The only Valis game to be released for the SNES relates *to Valis IV* like *Castlevania: Dracula X* does to *Rondo of Blood*—except it's even less of the same game . . . All the animated cut scenes are gone, of course, with nothing but a bare intro left to very briefly summarize the general plot of the game . . . The game reuses most of the same sprites and many of the same background tiles as *Valis IV*, but they are used to create a remix of entirely different stages and challenges. The problem is none of them are very good. The areas are long and boring and contain many of those pointless straight corridors known from the early games. The few boss fights that are actually hard are so in a rather frustrating way, and having to juggle around the extra weapons is counter-intuitive." – Hardcore Gaming 101 (hg101.kontek.net)

Notable Quotable:

"I've never played a game so spectacularly average in my life . . . The controls are responsive enough, and being able to switch between weapons adds strategy. The crisp, colorful scenery includes burning ruins, flowery meadows, and jewel-encrusted caves. In the meadow stage, the buildings in the distance caught my eye, including one that resembled a tower from *Lord of the Rings*. Your adversaries include knights and archers, but there are also a few original creations like winged women with spears . . . Most enemies aren't particularly aggressive and move in predictable patterns. Each stage ends with the obligatory boss encounter, and these include a grim reaper lookalike and a tiger-riding knight. The electronic background music is respectable but forgettable. In the final analysis, *Super Valis IV* serves its purpose, but that's about it. – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Insider Insight:

I always had a soft spot for the Valis series. I was in animation school when the franchise was at its peak, so I was enamored by the amazing cinematic cutscenes at a time when anime was relatively obscure in America. The Super Nintendo version of the game was mostly stripped of such material, as it lacked the ability to play full motion video without a CD-ROM peripheral, but the game was so solid the absence was excused.

The final entry on the SNES proved to be the best of the Valis titles and a fitting end to the series. Certainly one of the better side-scrolling action platformers of the time, the gameplay seemed perfectly balanced. Many late nights I would come so close to clearing a level, only to fail. I just could not put the controller down, having to give it one more shot until finding success. As a result, *Super Valis IV* usually led to a slow start to the day when the sunrise came too soon. – Michael Thomasson

Super Widget

Publisher: Atlus.
Developer: Atlus.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Based on the early 1990s cartoon series known as *Widget* or *Widget the World Watcher*, *Super Widget* puts players in the role of the title character, a cute, purple, shape-shifting alien who hails from the Horsehead Nebula. As a member of the World Watchers, Widget is assigned to protect Earth, which is under attack from villains bent on destroying the environment. Unlike *Widget* for the NES, this sequel arms players with a punch attack (as opposed to a firing mechanism), and *Super Widget* has sixteen levels (instead of just five), including Vegi-Land, Blue Beach, Space Wonderland, Ghostship, and The Water Planet.

The ability to transform returns, allowing Widget to become a dragon, a cyborg, an octopus, an ostrich, and other characters, each with differing abilities and attack methods. These transformations act as hit points and are important for making it past certain areas. As Widget runs, jumps, punches creatures, and otherwise works his way through the game, he can grab W coins, 100 of which grants an extra life. At the end of each world Widget must face a boss. After defeating a boss, the player will be graded based on combat skills and how long it took to complete the level. Performing well unlocks between-level bonus stages where you can earn extra lives.

Notable Quotable:

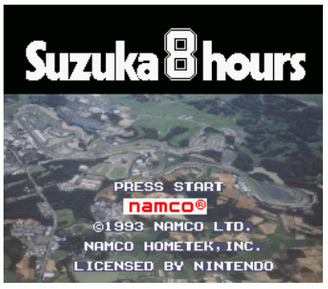
"Atlus usually does quality stuff, but this is not a good platformer. *Super Widget* certainly captures the look of the cartoon with some really cool sprites and a surreal aesthetic that could only be '90s animation, but this game is plagued by awful platforming mechanics . . . Widget is really drifty . . . everything is slippery, and precision is pretty much nonexistent. That goes for jumping . . . there's this overcompensation when you try to move in mid-air . . . Where the game shines is where it ties into the show . . . most of the game's fun is from finding new forms [to transform into]." – CGR Undertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"It's very bright and colorful, sprites are large and well-detailed, and it has a very cheerful feel . . . there's a surprising amount of detail, especially with Widget's facial expressions and the various forms he takes. You can see Widget strain when he jumps, try to balance himself when he stands on the edge of a platform, tense up when he has to duck, and flinch when he takes a hit . . . Widget controls pretty smoothly. He runs when you want him to, stops when you want him to, and the response time is pretty bang-on . . . doesn't offer too much of a challenge . . . an above-average Super Nintendo platformer." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Suzuka 8 Hours

Publisher: Namco.
Developer: Arc System Works.
Game Type: Motorcycle Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

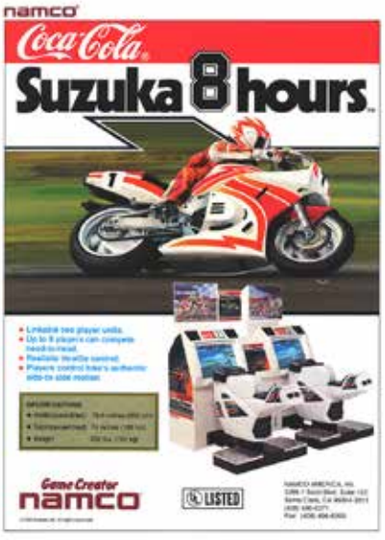


A port of Namco's 1992 arcade game, which came in a two-player sit-down model with replica motorcycles, *Suzuka 8 Hours* is based on the real-life endurance race of the same name held at the Suzuka Circuit in Japan each year. Players select from six different bikes, each rated according to acceleration, cornering, and maximum speed. You begin with 250cc bikes, but can earn 400cc and 750cc bikes by winning each tour. Game modes include Time Trial, Practice, 2P Race, and Race Tour, the last of which features four race lengths (3, 6, 12, or 96 minutes), five progressively difficult twisting and turning courses, and the challenge of finishing first against seven computer-controlled drivers.

The view of the action, which includes brief roadside pit stops, is from behind your bike (á la *Road Rash* and *Super Hang-On*), but the racing takes place on the lower half of the screen. The top half shows lap time, position, speed, and the like. Two-player action features a horizontal split-screen view. The buildings in the background are simplistic in appearance, but this is a decent-looking racer overall. The game lacks the Super FX chip, but it handles scaling and rotation well and has tight controls. It feels a little slow, though, even when you are driving a 750cc bike.

Notable Quotable:
"Dynamite scrolling and excellent control make this a must for racing fans. The password is a nice feature, as is the option to customize your bike. The two-player view is a little narrow and the sound could be punched up." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Some innovative controls and options help distinguish *Suzuka* from other driving games, but the racing graphics and animation have been done better in other Mode 7 games. If you're looking for a challenging racer with a good two-player mode, take a test drive." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1994)



SWAT Kats: The Radical Squadron

Publisher: Hudson Soft.
Developer: AIM.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

SWAT Kats: The Radical Squadron is based on the first season of the Hanna-Barbera cartoon series that ran from 1993–1995 for a total of twenty-three episodes and one special. It is a platformer with some light RPG elements, in that you can kill enemies and grab items to level-up your experience. You choose to play as one of the two main characters from the show: T-Bone is slow and can't jump very high, but his weapons are powerful; Razor runs fast, jumps high, and can use a jet pack, but his weapons are comparatively weak, meaning enemies can take five to twelve hits to kill. Both characters can jump on enemies like Mario and climb walls like Ryu Hayabusa from *Ninja Gaiden*.

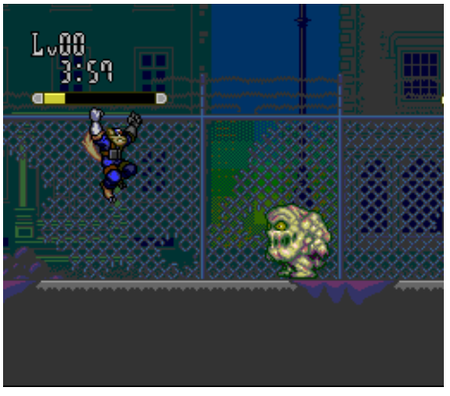
Weapons are short range, and you must wait until a bullet disappears to fire another. The graphics are nice, controls are tight, and the music is excellent (fans of the show will love it). However, the game is marred by top-down flying/shooting segments at the end of each level in which the background rotates (thanks to Mode 7 graphics)—an annoying and dizzying feature in this case. The action takes place in Megakat City, and is comprised of the following levels: Dr. Viper, Madkat, The Pastmaster, The Metal-likats, and Dark Kat, each riddled with enemies from the show and featuring such obstacles as moving platforms, falling debris, fire, and/or projectiles.

Notable Quotable:

"The youngest gamers might like *SWAT Kats*, but anybody older who's played a decent SNES game in the last two years will see why 16-bit games are on the way out. Primitive gameplay puts these kats on the endangered species list." – *GamePro* (September 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"*Swat Kats* had decent graphics and sound, but the gameplay was very lacking. I found little enjoyment in this title and would not recommend it. Your jumps seemed awkward, and there was simply no depth to the gameplay. The theme of a straight side-scrolling beat-em-up game is pretty tired, and this game does nothing more than prove that gamers want more." – *Game Zero* (August 1995)



Syndicate

Publisher: Ocean Software.
Developer: Bullfrog Productions.
Game Type: Action Strategy, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

An intriguing mix of strategy and open-ended action, *Syndicate* is loosely based on the 1993 cyberpunk computer game of the same name, which benefited from keyboard controls and had different levels, a less cartoonish style, and some other variations (including an ice gun instead of a flame-thrower). The year is 2096, and the world has been divided into fifty territories controlled by a few corrupt corporations. As an executive of one of these corporations, you must take control of all the territories, meaning the game has fifty infiltrate-and-capture and seek-and-destroy missions.

After selecting up to four cyborg agents and equipping them with weaponry (pistols, shotguns, and a special Persuadertron that forces enemies to join your team) you will shoot guards and police droids; take weaponry from fallen enemies; sell unwanted equipment; raise taxes; purchase weapons, upgrades, and equipment; drive around in vehicles; and more. The strategic altering of the adrenaline, intelligence, and perception of your cyborgs plays a key role in certain situations. The futuristic action is viewed from a ¾ overhead (isometric) perspective. Also released for the Genesis, Jaguar, and 3DO, the last version of which more closely resembles the computer game. Followed by *Syndicate Wars* (PlayStation).

Notable Quotable:

"Young gamers or those with little patience should stay away because *Syndicate* isn't easy. But advanced gamers and fans of the computer versions will get a satisfying bang out of the SNES cart. *Syndicate* is a thinking man's shoot-em-up game." – *GamePro* (September 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"I liked the game, but after the first 20 or so missions all upgrades will be completed, and there is still 60 percent of the game left . . . gets quite simple quite quickly, with little challenge or variation between stages, despite their varying color palettes . . . Maybe the game could be 'padded out' with narrative cutscenes between the stages to tell a richer story . . . despite the title theme being fantastic, the music is annoying and repetitive after dozens of hours of play . . . The control system is functional . . . Steve Caslin (a then-freelance programmer) did the bulk of the code from scratch with the original C source code and a PC version to refer to. The SNES version of *Syndicate* was therefore made with the new host platform continually in mind rather than forcing what exists on the PC into a game that doesn't suit it. Each level consists of 2,000 8 × 16 pixel cells, multilayered on the PC but on the SNES made up of just a single background plane and one foreground plane. Any overhead walkways are actually visual illusions and no map totally mirrors the original. Considering the much less precise means of control, walkways are wider and buildings are smaller, though they still far too often block the player's view of the characters they intend to control." – Boxed Pixels (www.boxedpixels.co.uk)

T2: The Arcade Game

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Probe Software.
Game Type: Light Gun Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Inspired by James Cameron's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), *T2: The Arcade Game* puts players in the Arnold Schwarzenegger role of a T-800 Terminator sent back through time to protect future Resistance leader John Connor. This entails guiding a targeting sight around a side-scrolling (and frequently static) playfield, shooting orbs, swat teams, ground hunter-killers, aerial hunter-killers, T-800 endoskeletons, and T-1000 advanced prototypes. Levels include The Battlefield, The Human Hideout, Trip to Skynet (protect John in his truck), Skynet, Cyberdyne Systems (destroy the place), The Freeway (escape T-1000's helicopter attack), and The Steel Mill (blast open a tanker).

Players are given unlimited machine gun fire and can pick up such weaponry as smart bombs, rockets, shotgun shells, a mini-gun, and an M-79 grenade launcher. The action is intense, and it is a good idea to have a second player join in to even the odds. The game has fewer voice effects than its 1991 coin-op counterpart, Midway's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (not to be confused with the console game of the same name), but it is a good port with nice (if somewhat downgraded) graphics. Compatible with the Super Scope light gun and Super NES Mouse. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"How fun is *T2*? It's probably the only good excuse you have for getting a Super Scope. If you love shoot-em-ups, put *T2: The Arcade Game* on the list of games that you gotta have. *Lethal Enforcers*, move over. The SNES has a date with a cyborg." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics and sound are reproduced perfectly, the Terminators move smoothly, and the gun FX sound real, but the gameplay fails to impress. I must admit I was looking forward to *T2*—I'm a big fan of the coin-op—but I'm afraid it's not the same without the Uzi gun from the coin-op shaking all over the place! That said, this is still a worthy game if you own a Super Scope, but if you want my opinion *Lethal Enforcers* gets the edge, and I'd get that instead." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (April 1994)

Insider Insight:

Since I am the world's biggest fan of the Terminator franchise, the *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* game was one that I pumped many quarters into at the arcade after work. When the home versions hit, they were boldly titled as and proclaimed to be *the* arcade game on your home console.

At the time I was a Sega Genesis owner and picked up the *T2* cartridge for that platform, and found it to be a graphically pleasing port with excellent gameplay and acceptable quality sound for a console port—I thought I could not ask for much more. Then by chance I stopped by the barracks room of one of my soldiers who was an SNES fanatic (I was a squad leader in the Army at the time), normally playing some silly fishing or sports game when I came by. But when I stopped in that day he was hammering through a level of the SNES *T2* port, and I assumed he had the sound feeding through the stereo rather than the TV, but he wasn't. Was it one of the new home theater TVs with upgraded sound? No, it wasn't that, either. The SNES port, while graphically similar to the Genesis, was belting out sound that was far closer to the arcade cabinet. The speech was more realistic and the music was worlds apart, which really delivered on the promised experience of having the nearest thing to the arcade cabinet in your home that you could achieve.

All versions of *T2: The Arcade Game* are pretty good, but the SNES game distinguished itself from the pack and left a lasting impression that remains to this day. This was just a few short years before I came to the full realization that it is possible to acquire and amass considerable numbers of full-sized arcade cabinets and was chasing the dream that we had all been chasing since we first found out that we could attempt to bring the arcade experience home with a console. – Scott Schreiber

Taz-Mania

Publisher: Sunsoft.
Developer: Visual Concepts.
Game Type: Character Racing, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

A completely different animal than the Genesis side-scroller of the same name, *Taz-Mania* for the SNES is a behind-the-runner racing game. You guide the Tasmanian Devil as he walks, runs, jumps, and spins down the highway, avoiding such obstacles as tour buses, street signs, and trees while trying to catch all the kiwi birds within a set time limit. Taz can also grab blue birds (points), red birds (points plus 10 seconds of time), Bushrat (points), bones (points), meat (points), steak (points), clocks (30 seconds of time), and trophies (continues).

Wendal T. Wolf will jump on Taz for protection and this covers the devil's eyes, making it difficult to see what is ahead. Also making things difficult are hunters Bull Gator and Axl, who ride in a scooter and side-cart, tossing traps (black holes, oil slicks, glue, and bear traps), or just trying to run Taz over. Pterodactyls will try to grab Taz and take him back to an earlier part of the level, Bushlad shoots arrows at Taz, and Buddy Boar tries to run him over with his car. Fortunately, an Acme delivery man will ride up on a scooter, delivering such items as spring shoes (for jumping higher) and rocket skates (for going faster), but you should be careful, because sometimes he will deliver things that should be avoided, such as TNT. At all costs, Taz must stay ahead of the Tasmanian She-Devil—if she catches up with him it is game over.

Gameplay is a bit redundant, and the action can be dizzyingly fast, but hectic racing, a charming concept, and cartoon-like graphics and sound effects make *Taz-Mania* a winner.

Notable Quotable:

"The draw distance is terrible. You have almost no time to react to anything coming at you . . . occasionally frustrating camera . . . isn't much fun to play . . . The Genesis version might not have been great, but I'm glad I grew up playing it instead of this." – Deadpark (www.deadpark.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a game with a very simple concept, yet very difficult gameplay. The animation, scheme, layout, and overall appearance is great, but the game itself can get immensely frustrating, especially considering there is not a single save point . . . it must be fully played in only one run-through. Gameplay could stand to be a little easier, and also a little more varied (more exploring of the actual levels, perhaps). Grabbing kiwis and birds is fun, but getting snapped up by pterodactyl dinosaurs and she-devils is not . . . Maneuvering around the cars is challenging yet fun (to an extent), and Taz's reactions after he gets hit/injured are amusing. The game has great music—catchy and old-school." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Insider Insight:
When the Super Nintendo console was released it was too expensive for me. As luck would have it, I won a gift card door prize at my school's after-prom party. The following Monday had me in Walmart with a system in hand, and I had just enough money for three extra games. I picked *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past* and *Street Fighter II*, but I didn't see anything else I really wanted, so this is how *Taz-Mania* came into my collection.

When friends would see this cartridge in my collection, they always had questions, namely, "Why?" followed by insults to my intelligence and maybe a negative hand gesture to finish off their query. I would usually respond with a "I enjoy it; it's fun." After playing it they were usually very adamant about it. "This has to be one of the dumbest games I have ever played," quickly followed by a "How much did you pay for this?"

I actually enjoy *Taz-Mania*, and for what it's worth a few of my friends did, too.

Taz-Mania is one of those games you either hate or enjoy for the quirks. You progress through the nineteen stages by consuming birds, steaks, and whatever else is in your way, but you should not eat everything—consuming a stick of dynamite will definitely impede your progress. Getting run over by cars or being attacked by alligators on motorcycles will produce the usual cartoon sight gag. Plus after each level Taz falls asleep, with the birds he ate flying out of his mouth. I believe that is a fair explanation of why he keeps running down roads, don't you? – Stephen Smith

Tecmo Secret of the Stars

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Tecmo—a company known for its sports games—jumped into the RPG genre with *Tecmo Secret of the Stars*. You star as a young boy named Ray, a descendant of the legendary Aqutallion. Unfortunately, the Evil Lord Homncruse seizes power from the Aqutallion and destroys your father—a former leader of the Aqutallion—throwing the world into chaos. You must find the magic crest of your fallen father and shape a new generation of Aqutallion warriors.

What this amounts to is wandering around a world map, exploring towns and dungeons, building and managing your own town, and engaging in turn-based, first-person battles against an assortment of monsters. You also get herbs from a farmer, talk to townspeople, use magic, battle an evil scientist, sleep to recover your hit points, pay a character to dig a hole, allowing access to a walled city, and much more, including equipping and using such items as swords and armor. You command two parties and can switch control between them. Areas to explore include Heart Island, Jeep Volcano, Old Hill, Winds (a destroyed town), Beegees (where the residents are dogs), Cave, Circus, Star Shrine, Ringo House, and Sidon Forest, among others.

Notable Quotable:

"Cute role-playing games are basically dominated by anything bearing the name *Final Fantasy*. Out of nowhere, *Secret of the Stars* by Tecmo challenges the RPG champ with a game complete with an involving storyline and a lovable cast of characters. While the graphics and music might not be up to par with *FF*, they do hold their own as exceptional elements in the game. So if you like *FF*, then you should definitely consider getting this game." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1995)

Notable Quotable:

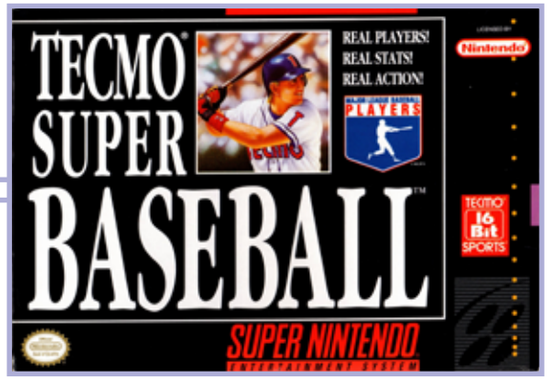
"If things had worked out well for *Secret of the Stars*, it could have been a perfectly acceptable mediocre RPG. Unfortunately, the way things turned out, it's pretty wretched. Any enjoyment I got from this game was from the comic relief provided by the translation, but that was a double-edged sword, as there also were a number of objectives that were not made clear. I found myself having to reference a FAQ with regularity, as when I'm told to do something like find a nail, but not given even a tiny hint as to where it may be; the concept of blindly searching the world for it doesn't appeal to me. Especially since the game already was making me travel all over the place with two different parties just to be able to handle the final dungeon. Not one of Tecmo's finer moments." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Insider Insight:
In the early '90s, I was a huge RPG fan. I was hungry for any game in the genre, and after completing masterpieces like *Final Fantasy III* and *Chrono Trigger*, I searched for the next title to scratch my turn-based-battler itch. After a walk through the aisles of my local Blockbuster Video I stumbled upon *Tecmo Secret of the Stars*.

Tecmo was not a company known for their RPGs. They were famous for titles like *Tecmo Bowl* and *Ninja Gaiden*, so I was initially skeptical about the company tackling the genre. Could an action/sports game company make a decent RPG? Though the game had somewhat unoriginal mechanics and visual style, I was delightfully surprised to find an original story and fun pacing suited for any RPG addict. The memorable elements I found were centered on town-building, finding and growing your party with support characters, and developing new magic spells. I never finished the game, and I have always wondered what kept me from making that final push to defeat the evil Homncruse. – Matt Raithel

Tecmo Super Baseball

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Sports/Baseball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



The follow-up to *Tecmo Baseball* for the NES, *Tecmo Super Baseball* lives up to its title thanks to fun gameplay, smart computer AI, good controls, and a deep Season mode (regular, reduced, or short) that lets gamers play, simulate, coach, or simply watch each game. Other modes include Preseason (exhibition) and Super Stars, the latter of which is more or less the unlicensed name for a Major League All-Star game. There are twenty-eight teams, each denoted by city name, and there are 700 real MLBPA players, each with stats and ratings based on the 1993 season. Lack of MLB licensing means there are no team logos or mascot names.

The SNES version of *Tecmo Super Baseball* employs Mode 7 scaling for fielding while the Genesis rendition uses the more typical ¾ perspective. The batting view is from behind the catcher. Other features include double steals, infield and outfield shifts, two hitting views, sixteen types of pitches (curveball, breaking curve, changeup, forkball, knuckleball, slider, etc.), four types of swings (normal, power, contact, and bunt), intentional walks, pitch-outs, battery backup for saving seasonal stats and progress, and more. On a less positive note there are no trades, and there is only one stadium.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a pioneering graphical approach to a baseball video game that easily matches or surpasses anything that other companies have put on the field." – *Game Players* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The controls take time to master because of how the field is shown from the fielder's perspective, which is a neat new feature that will influence other companies. *Tecmo Super Baseball* is the best to date!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"A nice balance between action and simulation . . . The only thing I wanted to see was the ball soaring in the air. Since fly balls are represented by a cursor on the field, it would have been great if the camera moved down a bit so you could react to the ball by sight alone. Regardless, the current view is still exciting. The batter-pitcher interface is equally impressive, with a series of menus used to [make selections] . . . Just make sure you choose the behind-the-pitcher perspective; the high batter's view is rather weak. Once you make your choice from the menu, you either determine the pitch location with the pad or time your swing with a button . . . Hitting is enjoyable because it isn't easy—you'll need to be wary of the different ball speeds and breaking amounts if you don't want to look foolish . . . One thing I was surprised to see was a very competitive opponent. It understands the fundamentals: outfielders back each other up, runners tag from third on deep fly balls, bunts are used to move men over to second, runners hold the bags on ground balls with less than two outs . . . The computer plays a very smart game and always remains a challenge." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Tecmo Super Bowl

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

First released on the NES—which was also home to the legendary *Tecmo Bowl*—*Tecmo Super Bowl* is arcade-style football with enough simulation features to please discriminating armchair athletes. NFL and NFLPA licensing allows for all twenty-eight teams of the time, each with different strengths and weakness, and each comprised of real players based on 1993 Spring Training rosters. There are four running plays and four passing plays, but gamers can customize the playbook. Primary modes of play include Preseason, Season, and Pro Bowl. Plus, you can elect to simply call plays as the coach and let the computer control the action.

Other options and features include injuries, worn-out players, substitutions, weather conditions (clear, rain, and snow), sacks, fumbles, dives (which are executed automatically), a three-year option (seasons 1991–1993), touchbacks, touchdown celebrations, battery backup for saving stats and standings, and more. Controls are simple (which is good for the most part, but you can't switch defenders once the ball is in play) and the overhead view action scrolls horizontally. Also released for the Genesis and PlayStation.

Notable Quotable:

"For a video football game, *Tecmo Super Bowl* gives the competition a good run for its money. It has plenty of teams and options to choose from, with realistic cinemas to give players a break from the action. Good sound effects." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The Super Nintendo version definitely has the better graphics and sound compared to the Sega cart, but it's not a huge leap from the NES title. While players are still small and have simple animation, the painted end zones, colorful graphics, and cleaner voice make this the best version available . . . The depth of team management really makes this title one of the SNES' best football games . . . You can even play three consecutive seasons in a row . . . One flaw keeps the game from perfection. As in the Sega version, the computer is easy to defeat in one-player mode. Scores in the upwards of 70+ points can be achieved with the better teams, so if you want to have fun with this game you need to grab some friends. Yet the game is still incredibly addictive and comes highly recommended if you enjoy multiplayer contests and can accept the arcade style of play." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:

In the rare instances when my brother and I could agree on a mutual game to play, it was usually *Tecmo Super Bowl*. My brother—the DeMarco resident jock—and myself, the family nerd, could enjoy the game together, regardless of our differences. To this day we still hum the music from the game, especially the more intense playoff music.

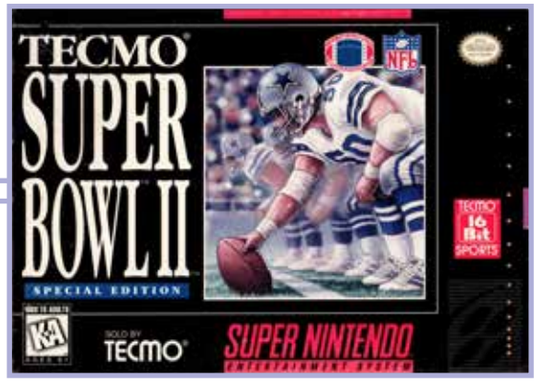
While Bo Jackson-less, *Tecmo Super Bowl* captured NFL rivalries pretty well. It may have been a coincidence with the AI, but I always felt the magic whenever my Buffalo Bills would tangle with the Miami Dolphins and the Isotoner Glove spokesman and *Ace Ventura* supporting actor, Dan Marino. (Ugh, I just hated his face, even in 8-bit form!)

Most of all, my memories of *Tecmo Super Bowl* are firmly harnessed around the emergence of weather and its effects in the game. While frustrating at times, this was something that was not present in most other football games of the era and added another element of realism to the otherwise standard 16-bit action. As in a real game of NFL football, you had to strategize and plan around weather—is it just me, or did the teams that called warmer climates home suck in the snow?

The greatest irony about this game, looking back, is how larger-than-life the players seemed, and yet it was all packed into these tiny pixels. That is why I believe so many retro gamers still prefer this over *Madden* titles, past or present—it captures the magical essence of the sport through the eyes of the fans who grew up with it. – Nick DeMarco

Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition was released in relatively small quantities (disgruntled consumers were told that *Tecmo Super Bowl III* would be released soon), making it one of the more valuable sports titles of the era in today's collector market. A number of additions to the series were made, including audibles; player trades; larger players; new player animations; new cutscenes; fake punts and field goals; a dive button (as opposed to automatic diving); two-point conversions; the ability to change defensive formations; scheduling based on the player's previous record; and double the number of offensive plays (thanks to two playbooks). The action still scrolls horizontally, but the view is angled for a somewhat better look at the field. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Despite its few flaws and lack of realism, *Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition* is still a simple, fairly entertaining game. The game just doesn't belong on the same field as *Madden '95*, *NFL Quarterback Club*, or *NFL '95*." – *Game Players* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"When all is said and done, it is the quality of the game that matters most, and that is exactly what Tecmo delivers—a gameplay feast for the mind and the trigger finger. A game that, while seemingly simple in nature, is full of depth, challenge, and fun. They named it 'Special Edition' for a reason: the manufacturing run is limited, and those that are at the store early to pay will play!" – *GameFan Magazine* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Despite all these features, the game isn't as fun as the first. Somewhere along the way it lost its 'soul.' The heart of what made *Tecmo Super Bowl* great was the clean interface, simple but colorful graphics, and catchy arcade sound. *Tecmo Super Bowl II* moves in the right direction with more flexibility, yet it falls back a couple of notches with its weaker presentation and questionable enhancements. The menu screens, sound, and field graphics have all taken a step backward. This is a title that tries to become a more 'grown up' looking game of football, but ends up in football limbo instead. Not sophisticated enough for sim addicts and too many cosmetic changes for the Tecmo faithful." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition

Insider Insight:
In late 1994, *Nintendo Power* gave a sneak peek at my wildest dreams: *Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition*. Having obsessed over every other *Tecmo Bowl* game, I was elated. I immediately put it number one in big print on my Christmas list. I left not-so-subtle clues to my parents. Come Christmas time, I ripped open each gift with progressively less energy. *Donkey Kong Country*! Awesome! *Contra III*! Cool. Cash? . . . Socks? What in the Ready Down Hut? Mom read the "Tecmo" defeat in my face. The clerk at Toys "R" Us told her the game was delayed, so she said the cash would cover it . . . Eventually.

Every week I rode my bike to Toys "R" Us. I pored over the little holding cards in the game aisle again and again, reading them like Tarot, searching for portent. No *Tecmo Super Bowl II*. I must be missing something, I thought. After several frustrating weeks I marched to the video game cage, demanding answers. The clerk delivered a *Mortal Kombat* fatality: they were not getting the game. Not soon, not ever. The dream was dead.

Years passed. Toys "R" Us video game cards disappeared. Online shopping and eBay became a thing. Aided by the internet and timely bidding, I finally got my copy of *Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition*, and I expected Christmas-morning awesome. Unfortunately, I got another package full of socks. *TSBII:SE* is bad. Very, very bad.

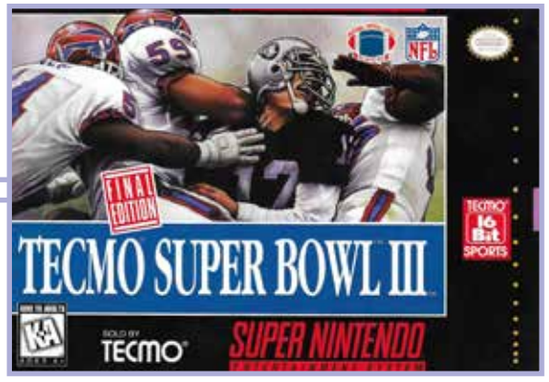
The cruel trick is that *Tecmo Super Bowl II* and *Tecmo Super Bowl III* look almost identical. Like the same model car, except one has a turbocharged V8 and the other a hamster-powered lawn mower. The pace of play is . . . different. From the weird lineman grappling, to delayed sound effects, to missing animations, it was fatality-level disappointment all over again. After years of waiting, of imagining the specialness of *Tecmo Super Bowl II: Special Edition*, I was again a kid on Christmas, all the wrapping in shreds around me without number one on my list.

The irony is that *TSBII* features Tecmo myth. Every neighborhood had a kid who claimed, "I intercepted a deflected pass, and it was amazing!" In almost every *Tecmo Bowl* game this feat is technically impossible. Every *Tecmo Bowl*, that is, except this one. The game introduced the mythic deflected interception; and it sucked. While I was already reeling from a sucky game, the computer deflected one of my passes. His buddy swooped in and intercepted my hopes and dreams. Deflected interceptions, much like *TSBII:SE*, are the opposite of enjoyable.

Tecmo Super Bowl II is Tecmo's mistake. To put it in rock album terms, it is the *Chinese Democracy* of video games. I suspect Tecmo knew any work on the game amounted to polishing turds; they released the far superior *Tecmo Super Bowl III* later the very same year.
– Dave Murray

Tecmo Super Bowl III: Final Edition

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.



Tecmo Super Bowl III features all thirty NFL teams from the 1994 season. Each team has real players and each player has accurate ratings. The game plays fairly similar to the second entry in the series, but it does contain some fresh features, including a new free agency system, new graphics, new speech and music, new passing modes, new cinema screens, and a larger field.

The most substantial upgrade is Superstar mode, which lets you create up to nineteen players, each with such adjustable abilities as agility, speed, and passing accuracy. Real team colors and logos are also used. Other features in the game include two-point conversions, audible plays, changeable offensive lineups, changeable defensive formations, dive plays and touchbacks, fake punts and fake field goals, weather conditions (fair, rain, and snow), and weekly standings. As in the first two games in the series the computer is a bit of a pushover, so it is a good idea to play against a friend. Includes battery backup. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"*Tecmo Super Bowl III* is a great game if only because it is different than the *Madden* games . . . brought back the side-to-side view of football before *Madden* and others began going strictly to the quarterback's point of view. The animated clips for diving catches and field goal attempts are cheesy, but football is only a game. Games like *Tecmo Super Bowl III* remind us of that from time to time." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While it lacks pro-style playbooks, the arcade-style action doesn't suffer from the relatively scant 32 offensive and defensive plays . . . a blast in two-player mode . . . spruced up visuals . . . The sounds aren't pro caliber. The tunes have energy, though, and the effects don't fumble . . . On defense, you can't switch to the player closest to the ball. It's also tough to quickly pick a receiver because you must cycle through all those eligible . . . easy to play and a gas for two antagonists. If you're looking for a Super Bowl party, tune in to this game." – *GamePro* (November 1995)

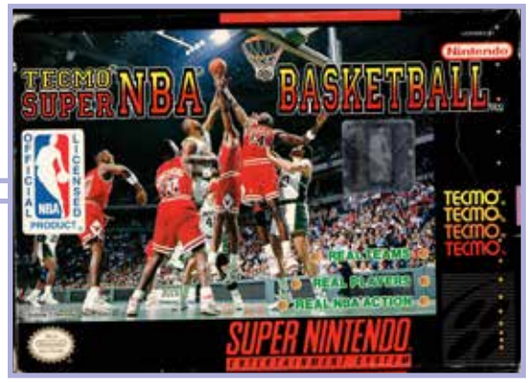
Insight:
I grew up a proud member of my own version of *The Sandlot* in the form of the SFL (Schoolyard Football League) in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Everyone knew their place and position, and in rain, sleet, or snow we played either two-hand touch or tackle football in our humble little "arena." These were the glory days of my childhood, which were further cemented by our collective love of *Tecmo Super Bowl III: Final Edition* on the SNES.

Very few times in my life can I feel like I was living vicariously through a video game, and for many of us in the SFL, this was the first game that allowed us to feel that kind of joy. There was something special about making a player, building them up, and in the case of our schoolyard QB Don Knight, being called in after the usual starting player went down with an injury to lead the team to victory. I can still close my eyes and see Don blow on his hands and rub them together as if he was truly going to take practice snaps before heading in and leading the team to a miraculous comeback.

Tecmo Super Bowl III, like the period of time in my life where football was everything, was bittersweet. We would never get another football game like it (*Madden*, meh), and I would never be as excited about a sport as I was when every day after dinner it was time to head to the ol' schoolyard and settle some rivalries. – Nick DeMarco

Tecmo Super NBA Basketball

Publisher: Tecmo.
Developer: Tecmo.
Game Type: Sports/Basketball, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



The follow-up to *Tecmo NBA Basketball* for the NES, *Tecmo Super NBA Basketball* features all twenty-seven NBA teams of the era and more than 320 real players, including Michael Jordan of the Bulls and Reggie Lewis of the Celtics (both of whom are absent in the Genesis version). The fun five-on-five action is supplemented by detailed graphics (including the crowd and bench players), smooth controls, good sound effects, and lots of nice features, including blocked shots, steals, fouls, injuries, substitutions (which are nice for injured or ineffective players), adjustable game speed, instant replays, overtime, digitized speech, and team and player stats. The action is viewed from the side, and battery backup saves Season progress (for regular, reduced, or short seasons). There are four modes of play: Manual (control a team), Coach (call the plays), Computer (watch the computer play a game), and Skip (instantly see the results of a computer-controlled game).

As with most 5-on-5 basketball games the action can get confusing at times, but the players are fairly well-drawn and nicely animated, so this problem is not as bad as it could have been. The voice effects are smooth and realistic compared to those of the Genesis version, which has scratchy voices. The animation is more fluid in the SNES game as well. The fans that cheer you on sound fantastic, and the sound effects are so authentic it almost seems as though someone took a tape recorder to a real basketball game and recorded sounds of swishing nets, clanging rims, and bouncing balls. The music has a fantastic, adrenaline-pumping beat. The only thing noticeably absent in this area are squeaking shoes and trash talking.

Sometimes when you drive the lane for a spectacular dunk, step outside to heft a three-point shot, or jump up to block a shot, you are treated to a cinematic close-up of the action. One unrealistic player mechanic of note is the shooting of free throws as players jump instead of leave their feet on the floor.

Notable Quotable:
"As fine a basketball game as there is. Uses all the best ideas from previous basketball games and adds a lot of good ideas of its own. Highly recommended." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"It's every bit as fun as *Tecmo Bowl* . . . simple, addictive, old-school NBA . . . The gameplay is really fun and the computer is not too easy to beat. It will challenge you. I'm also a fan of the in-game cutscenes on blocks, dunks, and three-pointers . . . really cool dunks in this game. They are smooth and look realistic and cool. The three-pointers are kind of hard to make (only about 10%-15% go in), and there is no turbo, and no way to pump fake. Also, when the player catches the ball he automatically starts dribbling no matter what. Overly simplistic. All players look the same other than height and race." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Insider Insight:
Tecmo Super NBA Basketball got me my first job. It's true. Instead of being released in December like every other game, Tecmo released *Super NBA* in March. This squashed any chance of being gifted *Super NBA*. In my house games came for holidays or birthdays, not "just because." Ninety-nine cents in my pocket, I ran to the PHAR-MOR, hoping to ease my *Tecmo NBA* fix with a one-day rental. Except PHAR-MOR didn't carry *Tecmo Super NBA*. With no other choice than to buy the whole game, Dave Murray's Neighborhood Car Wash opened its doors for business.

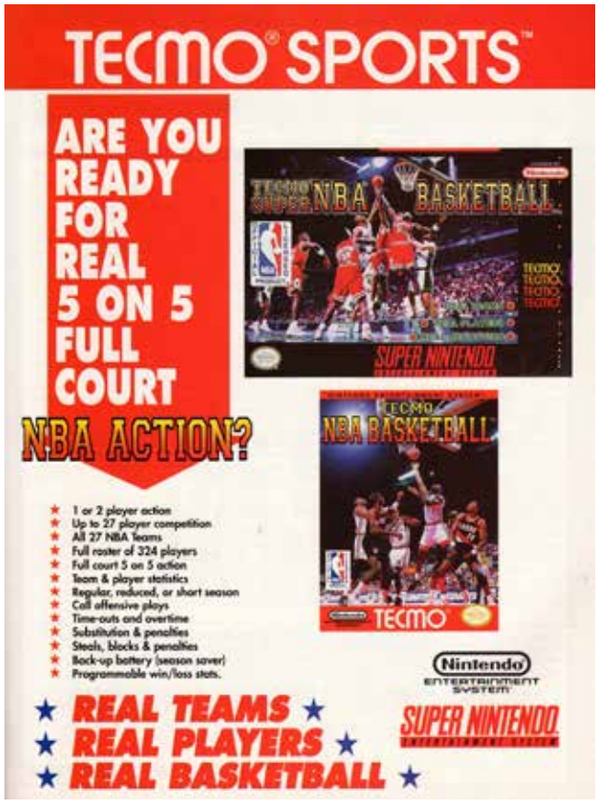
After washing a billion cars to be able to afford the game, my first impression of *Tecmo Super NBA* was utter tragedy. There is no greater triumph in a child's life than a trip to Toys "R" Us with money in one's pocket. It lends an air of independence and importance. "Make way all! I am buying a game!" Buzzed from the trip, and from buying a game with my own money, my brother and I sat and fired up *Tecmo Super NBA*. This being the early '90s, the only acceptable matchup was Magic vs. Hornets—Shaq vs. 'Zo. We paused after the opening tip-off. We both looked at each other. "Uh, who is this white dude playing center for the Hornets?" We paused to check the lineups. Mike Gminski? Stanley Roberts? So much for the thunder of Shaq Diesel vs. Alonzo Mourning.

We got over it. Even minus a few specific player inclusions, *Tecmo Super NBA Basketball* was worth all the prune-fingered car washes.

My friends and I would skip season play and cut right to the playoffs. Order drawn from a bucket, drafting our playoff squads was the NFL draft times 100. The Bulls and Knicks flew off the board. My secret, especially with a low pick, was the Clippers. The Clips were not especially good in real life, but a Tecmo accident made them nearly unstoppable. From the inbound, top baseline pass to the shooting guard, pass along the touchline to the small forward, then pass to the lower baseline to the cutting center for an open dunk. With the Clips' quick center, this play is an easy "2" almost every time (you can even swap your power forward and center if the power forward is faster).

The Ewing/Starks Knicks locked in a playoff battle against the Jordan/Pippen Bulls is incredible. Whichever friend chose the Celtics got teased relentlessly for picking the old, uncool team. In the early '90s, with everything neon and teal, it was get cool or get out. Of course, the uncool Celtics got the last laugh when Larry Bird unleashed his monsoon of three-pointers. And when things got too spicy, pressing the intentional foul button on a dunk sent your opponent flying. Shoving matches ensued, just like '90s NBA games. I do not advocate pre-teen fighting, but hating your best friend for three hours as a result of *Tecmo Super NBA Basketball* is a great memory to have.

The game only got better as I aged. There is nothing quite like a co-op game with a buddy and a few beers. – Dave Murray



Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV: Turtles in Time

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

An excellent two-player port of the four-player arcade game, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Turtles in Time* (Konami, 1991), *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV* (dubbed such because of the previous three TMNT games on the NES) is a highly enjoyable beat-'em-up, with players assuming the role of Leonardo, Michelangelo, Donatello, or Raphael, each of whom uses his patented weaponry, and each of whom has different special moves.

As the game begins, we find our favorite pizza-eating superheroes hanging around their sewer apartment, watching a little television. Friend and ace reporter April O'Neil is doing a live remote from the Statue of Liberty. Suddenly, a giant flying android comes screaming out of the sky and whisks April and Lady Liberty away. A collective cry of "Dude!" emits from the sewer, and the Turtles spring into action; they know Shredder and Krang are behind this nefarious plot.

The "Heroes in a Half Shell" begin their rescue mission in the streets of New York and, with your help, make their way to the Technodrome, which is Shredder's fortress. Using a Matrix Translocation Beam, Shredder then banishes the boys into a time warp. The Turtles find themselves on a whirlwind trip through time (from 2,500,000 BC to 2100 AD) while battling Foot Soldiers (hooded ninjas), Stone Warrior, Roadkill Rodney, Mechaturtle, Slash, Leatherhead, Bebop, Rock Steady, and any number of other Shred heads and Krang hangers on.

Each Ninja Turtle is rated according to normal attack, rush attack, special technique, defense, and speed. Each character comes equipped with a weapon (such as Michelangelo's nunchakus and Raphael's twin sai) and a special move (such as Leonardo's spin move and Donatello's high flying kick in the teeth). Regardless of which Turtle you choose you have many ninja attack moves at your disposal, such as catapult, whipit, bulldozer, the big hurl, snake killer (a sliding kick), and the cannon ball. A friend can join in and team with you side-by-side against the enemy forces.

The game features ten beautifully rendered levels of play: Downtown, Alleycat Blues, Sewer Surfin' (where you ride a sewer surfboard), Technodrome, 2,500,000 BC Prehistoric Turtlesaurus, Skull and Crossbones, Bury My Shell at Wounded Knee, Neon Nightriders (where you ride a neon nightrider, viewing your Turtle from behind), Star Base Where No Turtle Has Gone Before, and The Final Shell-Shock (where you battle archenemy Shredder).

If time travel is not your thing, you can challenge an opponent to a little one-on-one Versus fighting action, Ninja Turtle style. A Time Trial mode is also available. Here you must fight the clock as well as the Foot Clan in three courses, each with up to five rounds. *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles IV* is similar to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: The Hyperstone Heist* for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The best side-scrolling action game to appear on the Super NES so far." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"It's kinda weird to think that some of the most well-respected video games in the entire industry are not only based on a licensed property, but also about turtles that walk, talk, and kick ass . . . You're not limited to simply hacking away at the Foot Clan, as you can toss 'em side to side and even right into the screen, thanks to a nifty scaling effect . . . Amazingly, no matter how crowded things get, you'll never deal with the annoying slowdown that plagues so many SNES games. Considering the amount of color being pumped out by the cart, this is an even more amazing achievement . . . The only major noticeable change from the arcade version is the deletion of the lava boss at the end of the prehistoric age. He has been replaced by the cool (but not quite AS cool) Slash, an evil version of the heroes. To make up for the loss, there's a spectacular bonus stage late in the game with some of the best Mode 7 and parallax scrolling ever seen on any console. Even the addictive soundtrack has been replicated full-force, as have the voices that spout out all the stage names. Even the most jaded gamer will find tons to love about this one." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

The "Heroes in a Half-Shell" duke it out in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters*, a one-on-one, *Street Fighter II*-style fighting game. Each playable character can do fierce and normal punches and kicks, and each can jump, crouch, hold, and throw. In addition, each has a unique weapon, special attacks, and an ultimate attack.

Ninja Turtles include: Leonardo (katana blades, endless screw, shining cutter, roto cutter, millennium wave); Raphael (sai, chest buster, jamboree, power drill, energy spray); Donatello (bo staff, bo thrust, ground claw, headspin attack, fire dragon); and Michelangelo (nunchukas, rising thunder, dance fury, dynamite bomber, dragon breath). Unlike in typical cartoon and comic book scenarios, these Turtles can emit projectiles, such as energy blasts.

Other playable characters include War (razor sharp talons, turning uppercut, death from above, war dynamic); Aska (kunai, spin attack, spinning uppercut, tornado attack); Wingnut (plasma-propelled bat-wing, hovering, moonbuster, power dive, mad spectre); Armaggon (razor-sharp fins and teeth, aqua shock, fin slicer, tsunami); Chrome Dome (thunder gauntlets, electric pile driver, chrome spark, piston kick, chrome bomb); Cyber-Shredder (battle armor, knee crush, aura crusher, aura shield, lightning crusher); and Rat King (his entire body is a weapon, rat bomber, rodent suplex).

In Tournament mode, you select any character and battle your way through the other characters (including a clone of your character) one at a time to take home a cash prize. After winning four matches, you can try a bonus stage where you attack safes that fall onto the playfield. In Story Battle mode, you play as any of the four Turtles and fight your way through the other characters to gather information and discover who kidnapped April O'Neil and Splinter. VS Battle, which includes stage select, lets you and a friend battle one another using any of the characters—even the same character.

The NES and Genesis games of the same name are also one-on-one fighters, but they feature a number of differences. For example, the NES version has a four-player Tournament mode and the Genesis game has a different story. The character mix is also different.

Notable Quotable:

"The Turtles are all grown up—but still looking for a good brawl. The SNES version gives you 10 fighters to the Genesis' 8, and its graphics are much better, too." – *Game Players* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"10 characters and 10 locations to fight in. Brilliant. Well, brilliant in two senses, because, although it's completely great and everything, about half of the backgrounds are just far too bright and intrusive. Imagine the obtrusiveness of the Vegas stage of *SFII* but worse; that's how clogged the screen gets. It's a small price to pay for such a great game. *Tournament Fighters* more than makes up for it by being really fast, having some superb moves and generally 'feeling right' when you're playing it. The weight and inertia/momentum of the characters is almost perfect." – *Super Play* (January 1994)

Insider Insight:
My cousin Caleb and I loved fighting games. When we were given a stack of old Super Nintendo games well after we had enjoyed the deep worlds of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* for the Nintendo 64, we rejoiced at the pile of fighting games we had acquired. This is where we learned that battling out our differences was much fairer in a video game than in real life, as he is about twice my size. We both loved cartoons, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Tournament Fighters* was an instant hit for our sleepovers.

While we both accepted that *Street Fighter II* was vastly superior in terms of gameplay, we loved the *Tournament Fighters* characters and enjoyed finding their secret moves. With new characters we had not seen before—like War and Aska—we spent more hours than we intended playing through each story mode and battling each other. With this and a few of the other fighting games we owned we would often imitate their special moves, resulting in fits of laughter.

Looking back on it, *Tournament Fighters* was a cash-grab on the fighting game craze that was spurred on by *Street Fighter II*. Developers frantically tried to emulate Capcom's magic, creating tons of similar games. In our teenage years we didn't care. It was another game to play together, and that is all that mattered. – Alex McCumbers

The Terminator

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Mindscape/Gray Matter.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Based on the low-budget (but excellent) 1984 sci-fi classic, *The Terminator* puts you in the role of Kyle Reese (Michael Biehn in the movie), going back in time to protect Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton)—mother of John Connor, future leader of the resistance against the machines. Armed with a plasma rifle, you must battle such enemies as endoskeletons, infiltration units (slightly tougher than endoskeletons), satellites units (some of which fire at you, some of which unleash little worm-like machines that crawl toward you and explode), hunter killers, street thugs, attack helicopters, police officers, and the Terminator (Arnold Schwarzenegger) himself. At various points in the game you can power-up with grenades, rapid fire, rockets (only in stage one), an M16A2 machine gun, and a bullet-proof vest. You can also grab brass knuckles (stage four), first aid kits, extra lives, a steel pipe (stage six), and pipe bombs (stage six).

The game has six stages: The War Against The Machines, Rooftop Rampage, Street Chase I, Jailbreak!, Street Chase II, and You're Terminated! In four of the stages you run and jump on platforms and do such things as climb ladders, leap across ledges, open doors to get items, and duck under enemy bullets. In the two Street Chase stages you are behind the wheel of a vehicle (motorcycle in I, police car in II), shooting, passing, and dodging enemy cars (you must also avoid roadway signs). In these two stages the action is viewed from behind your vehicle.

The Terminator film was also adapted (in various forms) for the Game Gear, NES (which features top-down driving stages), Sega Genesis (which lacks driving stages), and Sega CD (which lacks driving stages, but features digitized footage, music, and sound effects from the movie).

Memories: In 1984, when I was a junior in high school, my friend and I heard about this little sci-fi thriller called *The Terminator*, featuring Arnold "Conan the Barbarian" Schwarzenegger in the title role. The movie sounded cool, but we really did not know much about it. Unlike *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991), which had a huge budget and released to tons of fanfare, *The Terminator* was made for less than $7 million and had relatively little advertising beyond word of mouth. We didn't really know what to expect as we sat in that darkened theater, munching popcorn and drinking Coca-Cola, but we were mesmerized from the title screen to the closing credits—it is always fun to be pleasantly surprised (floored in this case) by a movie that has not received much hype. With its taut and tense storyline, excellent special effects, breakneck pace, plausible dark future, and unrelenting antagonist, *The Terminator* remains one of the greatest action/science fiction films of all time.

Notable Quotable:

"*Terminator* started strong, then got weak, then got strong again thanks to the driving portions. Unfortunately, the bad outweighs the good, and what could have been a good game falls way short due to some sloppy levels that are just too stiff." – *GameFan Magazine* (April 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Everything horrible about the Genesis version is much improved here . . . this version takes its source material and [does] much more with it . . . Graphics are very cartoony, but look far superior to the Genesis. Explosions look particularly striking, as do the backgrounds. Flashes of light and movement clue us in to other skirmishes going on elsewhere, as you run your own gauntlet through the apocalyptic landscape. Beams and piles of concrete also scroll by in the foreground, giving a nice sense of depth . . . You fight patrols of metal Terminator skeletons as you go along, which are fun to smash. Some can be blown in half and crawl after you, others fly apart in shards of metal and fire . . . the game lags here considerably, as the rooftop levels are painful and difficult to play through. You never get a clear sense of where you're going (but head to the upper right), and there are far too many ladder-to-ladder 'leaps of faith' required . . . Background music is mostly dead-on . . . However, your character makes an annoying 'sproing' noise every time he jumps, and the other effects are just generally lacking . . . if you want an excellent Terminator game or a fast and enjoyable platformer, this is a good choice." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Terminator 2: Judgment Day

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: BITS.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Based on the 1991 landmark action film starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* puts you in the role of a T-800 Terminator, the same character Arnold played in the movie. Following the general plot line of the feature film, the game casts you as the Terminator, sent back in time to protect the future savior of humanity, John Connor, and his mother, Sarah, from being assassinated by a T-1000 Terminator. You must also destroy a new form of microchip technology (based on the T-800 chip) that eventually led to machines becoming self-aware and taking over the world.

As the story plays out, you must punch, kick, and shoot your way through scads of bad guys, including the liquid metal T-1000, who appears frequently and sometimes morphs from background objects into his police form. You can crouch, jump, climb stairs, and pick up weapons, including a pistol, a machine gun, a shotgun, and a multi-barreled mini-gun. You will also want to collect future objects, such as an endoskeleton head. The Terminator's HUD (head-up display) updates you throughout your mission, pointing out important information, and you can track the status of your objectives via updates or the "start" menu.

The eight levels of action include The Corral, John Connor's Home, The Mall (where you will search for and find John Connor in the arcade), The State Hospital (where you will locate and rescue Sarah Connor), Enrique's Ranch, The Dyson Residence, Cyberdine Systems, and The Steel Mill. Top-down driving stages with lots of diagonal roads are interspersed between the action levels. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"Don't let the errant driving stop you from checking out this cool movie cart. The rest of the game is brimming with nonstop action and fast-on-your-feet puzzle-solving. You'll spend more time trying to beat this cart than you did watching the movie on cable TV." – *GamePro* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The graphics in *T2: Judgment Day* are strictly average. From animation to backgrounds, you've seen it all before—only better—in a dozen other Super NES games. The music and sound are also very average and very forgettable . . . a decent game hurt by subpar graphics and a lack of continues." – *VideoGames* (September 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"This isn't *entirely* the generic, platform cash-in you would expect. Quite a bit of the background can be destroyed or shot up, and I remember enjoying the (admittedly cheap) glass-shattering effects and exploding equipment when shooting past background scenery. Rooms will show the results of a protracted gunfight, and blowing open objects sometimes even burps out worthwhile extra ammo . . . Gameplay itself is based around completing objectives appropriate to each level before finding the exit. In the truck stop, you'll need to beat up bikers for their weapons. At John's house, you're searching for his photo ID and whereabouts. In the hospital, you're breaking Sarah out. The Connors follow you around levels once they're discovered, and you're required to shield them from harm . . . *Judgement Day* doesn't feel too far off the mark. Character sprites are small, but its graphics are strong overall. It handles well. Having to trawl the level for future objects, and having John and Sarah be dumb as a bag of hammers, are both annoying, but manageable. Unfortunately, it's the driving levels where things fall apart. Either giving vehicles more health, or offering passwords, would have reduced the frustration here significantly." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

Tetris & Dr. Mario

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

The two marquee puzzle games on the NES—*Tetris* and *Dr. Mario*—are collected on one 16-bit cartridge with slightly enhanced graphics, music, and sound effects. These are two highly playable classics that most anyone can enjoy, regardless of skill level.

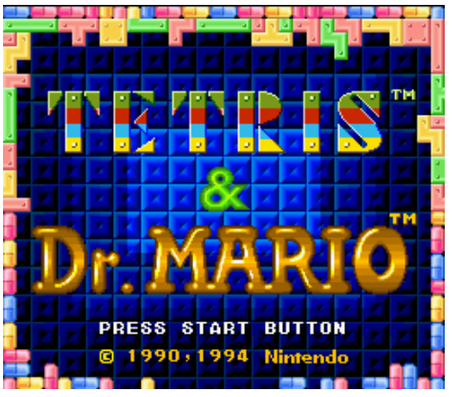
In *Tetris*, players manipulate seven different types of blocks (sometimes called tetrominoes) that fall one at a time from the top of the playfield to the bottom. Each block—S-shape, Z-shape, T-shape, L-shape, line-shape, mirrored-L-shape, and square-shape—is made up of four squares. Players can rotate the blocks and move them right and left. The objective is to piece them together to form horizontal lines. When an unbroken line is formed it disappears, clearing up space. If the blocks pile up to the top of the playfield it is game over. Clearing two to four rows at once scores extra points. In A-Type mode, players simply clear as many lines as possible to earn points. In B-Type mode, players work to score as many points as possible before completing twenty-five lines. Like the original arcade version of *Tetris* (1984) and the Tengen version of *Tetris* for the NES, split-screen action is available. In the one-player version of split-screen (against the computer) there are three difficulty levels: easy, medium, and hard.

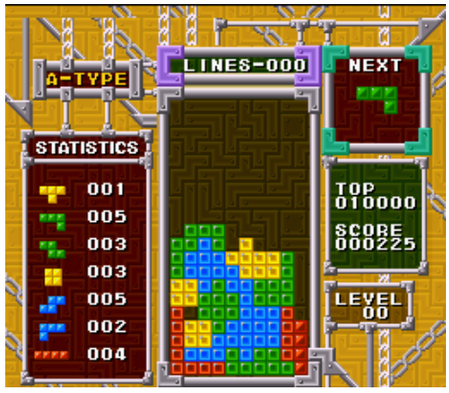
In *Dr. Mario*, Nintendo's famous mascot turns his plumbing gear in for a medical degree. The good doctor, positioned near the top of the screen, drops vitamin capsules into a bottle-shaped playfield that contains blue, red, and yellow viruses that resemble little creatures. As the vitamin capsules—which are blue, red, yellow, or a combination of two of those colors—fall down the screen (one at a time) players rotate and move them in place to remove the viruses. To remove capsules or viruses, you must line up four of the same color in a row diagonally or vertically. Once the viruses have all been removed the action continues at a faster, more difficult pace. Options include music type, number of viruses in the bottle when play begins, and how fast the capsules fall: slow, medium, or fast. In two-player split-screen mode, removing more than one color group at a time drops half-capsules into your opponent's bottle.

There is also a Mixed Match split-screen mode in which one gamer can play *Tetris* while the other plays *Dr. Mario*. Players can customize this mode according to difficulty level, play time, and music.

Notable Quotable:
"Enhanced graphics and sounds for the SNES, though nice, aren't key factors here. Sharp controls and absorbing action are what make these two classics even better as a pair than they were alone." – *GamePro* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"*Tetris* is a bona fide classic and considered by many to be one of, if not the greatest game of all time. While *Dr. Mario* isn't nearly as popular, it's still a fun and addictive puzzler that can suck hours from your life, if you let it. While a few shortcomings, most notably the lack of a save battery and mediocre presentation, hold this game back from perfection, at the end of the day you can't beat having two top-notch puzzlers on the same cartridge." – SNES Hub (playingwithsuperpower.com)





Insider Insight:
Tetris is the game I spent the most hours playing as a kid, by far. Not because it was my favorite all-time game, but because it was the game that came with the Game Boy. When I got the handheld system, I played it everywhere. I mean *everywhere*: at recess, at the dinner table, while watching TV, when I was supposed to be asleep, you name it.

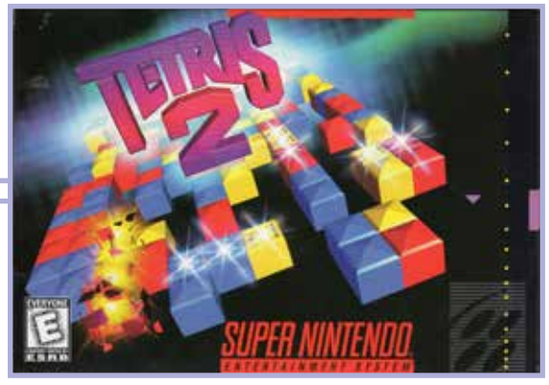
The Game Boy *Tetris* theme song is forever stamped into my memory (not that I mind—it is super catchy). Even when I play *Tetris* today, the idea of building up a wall of Tetris pieces and leaving just one sliver open for the moment you get a "line" and then after what feels like forever, you *finally* get one and then you blast your entire game, dropping that line for a "Tetris"—that is still one of the most satisfying things ever.

Soon after, I discovered *Dr. Mario*, and the cycle repeated: I spent hours upon hours trying to become a "Dr. Mario Master" (which I never did, for the record). This game actually got new life for me in 2016, with the release of the NES Classic plug-and-play console, as my fiancée (now wife) and I played it daily against each other. (Note to self: find more cooperative games to play in the future because in our house we are too competitive, and it never ends well!)

When *Tetris & Dr. Mario* released in 1994, I had played both games separately, so I did not rush out to the store to buy it. When I finally did play it I was already comfortable with both games. I remember wishing the Mixed Match mode actually merged both games at the same time instead of playing one then the other, then the first one again. *Puyo Puyo Tetris* does this very well, and that is actually the game I am playing the most on the Switch right now as I write this. So I guess in a way it came full circle. – Arda Ocal

Tetris 2

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



This is the definitive version of *Tetris 2*. Gameplay is virtually identical to its Game Boy and NES counterparts, but the added processing power of the Super NES allows for more vibrant graphics, better-flowing blocks, and slowdown-free two-player action. The SNES cart also has a Puzzle mode.

The game is a cross of sorts between *Tetris* and *Columns*, with fixed blocks and flash blocks (which are already set in place on the screen as play begins) added to the falling block formula. As in *Tetris*, formations of blocks fall from the top to the bottom of the screen, and players must maneuver the blocks to make them disappear. Unlike *Tetris* (and more like *Columns*), the blocks come in three colors—red, green, and yellow—and the objective is to align three or more of the blocks of the same color vertically or horizontally to rid them from the playfield. Eliminating a flash block makes all blocks of the same color vanish, and eliminating all flash blocks advances the game to the next level.

In two-player split-screen mode, eliminating flash blocks makes the other player's ceiling drop down one line. In addition, creating chain reactions makes the other player's blocks fall faster. Fans of *Dr. Mario* will thoroughly enjoy *Tetris 2*, which is known as *Tetris Flash* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

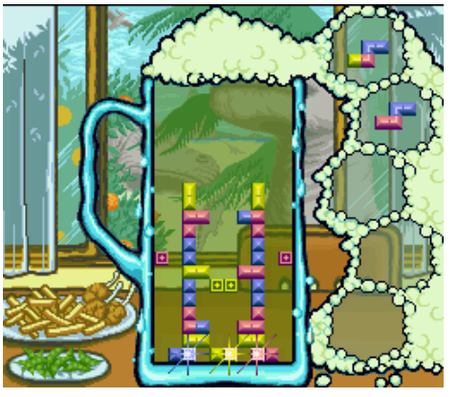
"The two-player mode is an absolute addictive blast and will keep a pair playing all night!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The blocks have the expected clean, spare look, but behind them are new backgrounds that add interest. Bouncy music accompanies the action, and nifty sound effects add effective clicks and clanks when the blocks bang together. As good as *Tetris* was, the sequel outdoes it." – *GamePro* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"So how do you improve on the classic gameplay of *Tetris* when it's time to release a sequel on an unsuspecting audience? Well, if you're Nintendo, you change everything except the shapes and the ever-present element of gravity . . . a game that receives constant attention around the offices of EP. As a two-player contest, it is the slickest diversion a puzzle game can ever hope to be. After the few quarts of blood we like to drain playing *Samurai Shodown*, it is refreshing to pick up a game with soothing music, pastel colors, and delightful little cartoon characters." – The Electric Playground (formerly at www.elecplay.com)



Insider Insight:

I got *Tetris 2* on NES the day it came out, and I played it like crazy. So when nearly a year later I saw it come out on SNES, I was not too sure if it was worth double dipping. After playing it at my neighbor's house, I quickly confirmed that it was. While the basic gameplay was exactly the same, the presentation went in a completely different direction. Where the NES game had an Egyptian motif, the SNES version was based around the inside of someone's house. The result was incredibly charming, and in some cases—like the stage that was shaped like a mug of root beer with the "next" pieces showing up in a series of foam bubbles spilling over the side—remarkably clever. There were even little animated segments that popped up on the in-game TV that were actually pretty funny.

But it is not the super-creative stages or the great soundtrack, or even the game itself that sticks out to me most; it is the sound effect when you place blocks. You know when you get a Snapple or a ketchup bottle and the cap has that pop-up seal and then you take that cap and press it like a button? Cross that sound with that of crushing an aluminum can and you are on the right track. It is seriously one of the most satisfying sound effects in any video game ever and worth the price of admission alone. – Kris Randazzo

Tetris Attack

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo/Intelligent Systems.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1996.

Unlike most *Tetris* sequels, which feature falling objects, *Tetris Attack* has colorful square panels (featuring a star, a heart, a diamond, or other such design) that rise from the bottom of the screen. Players quickly zip a cursor around the playfield, rearranging the panels two at a time with the goal of aligning three or more identical colors in a row, effectively eliminating them from the screen. While you can only switch the panels horizontally, the identical panels matched up horizontally or vertically will be erased. Combos and chain reactions reap an assortment of rewards, such as bonus points and the encumbering of your opponent's playfield with garbage blocks.

While cuter and more colorful than any prior game in the series, *Tetris Attack* is in no way less intense, less difficult, or less addicting. It is downright frightening how quickly the hours can melt away while you are mesmerized by this thoroughly challenging game, which is especially enjoyable in two-player (split-screen) mode. The nifty in-game tutorial hosted by Yoshi is a nice bonus. The redundant sound effects are pedestrian, but the restrained new-age melodies are very easy on the ears.

The game's only true flaw is what I call the "panic" maneuver. If you are having limited success clearing panels, you can move the cursor around the screen at top speed, switching panels randomly, hoping to luck into some matches, combos, and chain reactions. While not a surefire method for success, this kind of "cheating" works pretty well far too often. Even so, the game is highly recommended. Known as *Panel de Pon* in Japan.

Fun Fact: *Tetris Attack* is essentially the same game as *Pokémon Puzzle Challenge* for the Game Boy Color and *Pokémon Puzzle League* for the Nintendo 64.

Notable Quotable:

"Why this SNES game has 'Tetris' in its name we have no idea. What we do know is that *Tetris Attack* is one of the most addictive puzzle games ever created." – *Game Informer* #100 (August 2001), which ranked it the ninety-sixth greatest video game of all time.

Notable Quotable:

"In the summer of 2002, I played a game called *Tetris Attack* on the SNES every single day. It didn't matter to me that the game system was a decade past its prime or whether the sun was shining—an addict, I would play against my college friends and we'd spar over the controllers. Of course, we weren't the only ones attached to the games that Nintendo created in the '80s and '90s. Experts still consider those games some of the greatest ever made in terms of their level of difficulty and sheer inventiveness." – Jessica Grose (www.slate.com)

Insider Insight:

From the moment the Nintendo logo appears on the screen (accompanied with a sampled child's voice), it is clear that this is not a straightforward *Tetris* game, going even farther beyond other *Tetris* spin-off games appearing on the Super Nintendo.

The contrast from the darker tones and carved stone aesthetics is presumably caused by the game's origin: a Japanese puzzle title called *Panel de Pon*, which Nintendo adapted, replacing the colorful anime artwork with the child-like, hand-drawn universe that the Yoshi-themed games have adopted.

Whether the sickly sweet graphics and twee background music appeal to you or not, it would be a disservice to overlook the game for these reasons alone, as what lies beneath contains both a tense, competitive puzzle game and also a slower, strategical solo game that gets devilishly tricky towards its latter half.

The core gameplay presents itself as a match-three puzzle game, but rather than having a constant feed of puzzle pieces falling from the top of the playfield, *Tetris Attack* fills its playfield line-by-line from the bottom. The colored panels are then swapped horizontally, two at a time, by the player cursor.

While this may sound restrictive next to similar but more liberating titles such as *Zoo Keeper* and *Puzzle & Dragons*, the two core concepts—the playfield moves automatically vertically and the player moves tiles horizontally—result in a unique mental agility required to piece together the core components of advanced play; longer matches involving four and five panels, and identifying and creating chain reactions.

When you fancy a more relaxed style of play, the solo puzzle mode presents you with a preset panel layout and a limited number of moves to clear the board to "solve" the puzzle. This is probably where I have ended up spending the majority of my time with *Tetris Attack*, as I refuse to admit defeat, knowing that the correct solution is only ever a maximum of a couple of moves away.

It is unfortunate, then, to have to fall back on a cliché, but *Tetris Attack* really is a shining example of a game that is almost immediately obvious to grasp, but offers a juicy amount of depth to attempt to master, even if that is just so you can get one over on your friends. – Ben "Random Dave" Lancaster

Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Educational/General/Mission-Based Racing, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

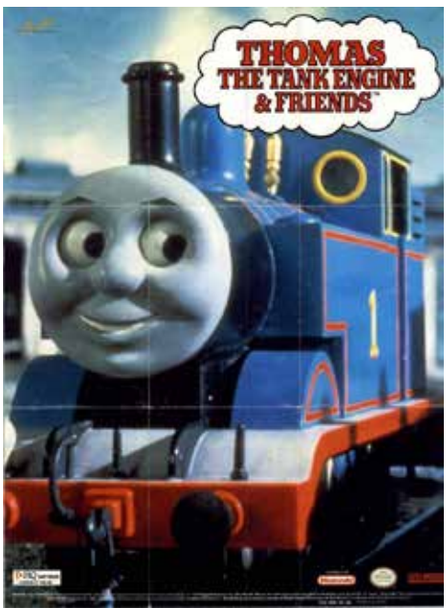
Inspired by the popular children's television series *Shining Time Station*, *Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends* was designed for children from three different age groups: four and younger, five to seven-year-olds, and eight years old and up. The game is comprised of a series of reading adventures, jigsaw puzzles, sliding puzzles, and quizzes featuring characters familiar to fans of the TV show, including Bertie the Bus, Harold the Helicopter, and Sir Topham Hatt, superintendent of the railways.

In addition to the educational games there are action contests, such as Setting the Switches, in which you guide Thomas to his destination by setting track switches; Let's Race, which pits Thomas in a race against either Bertie or Percy, the cheerful small engine; and Fixing the Tracks, in which you must construct tracks to help Thomas transport people and goods around the Island of Sodor. The game includes lots of voice effects and is much different than the more action-oriented Genesis version.

Fun Fact: *Thomas the Tank Engine & Friends* was also planned for release on the NES, but it was never produced. In 2008, a prototype of the game was found, and it is very similar to the SNES version, but with no voice effects and of course lower-quality graphics.

Notable Quotable:

"For the hardcore Thomas fan, it should prove to be enjoyable, especially one of the mini-games where you watch a storybook version of one of Thomas' adventures and have to decide how the story plays out . . . As Thomas moves around the track, his trademark steam whistle and theme song is played and is surprisingly accurate to the original television theme . . . Animations are blocky, and it's sometimes difficult to spot where the cursor actually is on the screen. Backgrounds are a little dull, which I guess is supposed to highlight the brighter reds, blues, and greens of the engines themselves . . . a young child's game, and it doesn't try to be anything more than that, so don't expect groundbreaking gameplay." – Honest Gamers (www.honest-gamers.com)



Thunder Spirits

Publisher: Seika.
Developer: Technosoft.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

A port of the 1990 Sega/Technosoft arcade game *Thunder Force AC*, which itself is a modified port of *Thunder Force III* for the Genesis/Mega Drive, *Thunder Spirits* is similar to *Thunder Force III*, but with altered music, certain redesigned levels, and regrettably, the absence of level select. As in *TF III*, players pilot a starfighter from left to right, dodging enemies and their projectiles, grabbing power-ups (some of which rotate around your ship), and blowing away a variety of alien creatures, gun emplacements, and alien spacecraft with such weapons as wave beams, front shots, back fire, twin shots, and homing missiles. Shoulder buttons conveniently toggle weaponry and speed while pressing start/select accesses a hidden rapid-fire option.

You will shoot your way through eight levels, including jungles, caves, fire, water, and outer space. There is usually a mini-boss near the middle, and at the end of each level you will battle a boss—such as Gargoyle or King Fish—that has specific weak points. Your overall objective is to destroy the enemy forces of the Orn Empire. Followed by *Thunder Force V* for the PlayStation. *Thunder Force IV* was only released overseas.

Notable Quotable:

"Where this port and the arcade game differ are in their levels. Two planets have been removed—Haidis the cool underground world and Ellis the ice planet . . . Their replacements are lackluster in comparison . . . One of the levels is even rehashed from *Thunder Force II*!" – Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Notable Quotable:

"While there's nothing blatantly wrong with how it plays, *Thunder Spirits* lacks the flair that made *Thunder Force III* a great experience . . . After you get the claw item, slowdown kicks in because the game simply cannot handle the amount of on-screen action . . . *Thunder Spirits* is even easier than *Thunder Force III*. Never mind bumping the difficulty to 'mania' (very hard) because the challenge increase is pretty minimal and the rewards are the same in the end (there is no additional score bonus for playing in a higher difficulty setting)." – 1CC Log for Shmups (1cclog.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight:
Thunder Spirits is a decent port of the arcade game *Thunder Force AC*. My initial feeling is that although it feels great to be playing a *Thunder Force* game using the SNES controller, this game feels like it took a step back in terms of quality. This is one of the few cases where I have ever felt that a Genesis title outshined a similar SNES title. The SNES dropped the level select, and four of the game's levels are practically identical to *Thunder Force III*. Graphically it has issues as well, with a limited color pallet and some noticeable slowdown and flicker, usually during boss fights. – Martin Alessi

The Tick

Publisher: Fox Interactive.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Rising from the depths of obscurity to mainstream popularity in 1994, Ben Edlund's farcical superhero creation the Tick, whom he created in 1986, got his own Fox Kids cartoon, a line of action figures, and a 16-bit video game. At 400 pounds, the seven-foot-tall, nigh-invulnerable Ninja-hating super hero is hilarious with his blue tick outfit and his inept (though miraculously successful) crime fighting techniques.

In *The Tick* for the Super NES you, as the blue-clad hero whose battle cry is "Spoon!", must punch, kick, jump, and climb your way through forty-four levels (set up as sixteen chapters of a story) of Ninja mayhem, including many city streets and rooftops that Tick gracefully jumps across. The Tick also walks across power lines and on top of moving busses. The platforming takes place on a 2D plane, while the combat has a view like *Streets of Rage*, where you can move into the background a bit. Along with fighting Ninjas and avoiding projectiles, Tick must face enemy bosses, clowns, and an assortment of kooky but deadly villains with such names as Dentures, Toot Toot, Deadly Nose, Eyebrows Mulligan, and Sagin the Wolf.

During the sprawling slugfest you will receive help from your sidekick Arthur, a Ninja-hating moth. Also on hand is an assortment of super pals, such as Paul the Samurai, an honorable warrior from Japan; Oedipus, the heroic hostage; and the American Maid, a patriotically dressed super heroine. The SNES version has slightly better graphics than its Genesis counterpart. A planned PlayStation and Sega Saturn port of the game was cancelled.

Fun Fact: The 2001 live-action *The Tick* television series starred Patrick Warburton (who played Puddy in *Seinfeld*) in the title role. In the 2016 series Peter Serafinowicz wore the blue tights and antennae.

Notable Quotable:
"*The Tick* is a side-scrolling punch-'em-out action title with tedious action and plain enemies. The antics of the lead character are humorous at times, but it isn't enough to really make this title worthwhile." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"This game sucks more than I ever thought possible. After about the billionth ninja, I thought I was going to snap. Then came the Idea Men. Gray Idea Men. Light gray Idea Men. Dark gray Idea Men. A million Idea Men. A million identical, boring Idea Men. Followed, of course, by a million boring, identical clowns." – *Game Zero* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The Fun Factor is below par. The gameplay starts out okay, but it soon turns mundane. Even with its subplots, most of the game is an endless wave of the same enemies. *The Tick* has a lot of the biting humor of the comic, but personality and a ton of levels aren't enough to make a good game. *The Tick*'s flaws will really bug you." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"*The Tick* is easily one of the most simple and boring beat-'em-up games I've ever played . . . requires no strategy or skill . . . graphically, the game looks fairly decent. The Tick's character model looks good and the enemies are pretty good-looking as well . . . The soundtrack is actually quite good, even if the game only has a few tracks." – Dubious Gaming (YouTube)

Insider Insight:
Out of a full "duck-dwee duck-duck-duck dwee-dow," *The Tick* disappointingly only ranks at about a "duck-dwee and a half" in my memory banks. I was so excited for it, too—I kid you not when I say I love me some '90s *The Tick* on Fox Kids as much as I ever loved *The Simpsons* of the era (itself quite substantial!). The cartoon is amazing, and it holds up remarkably well. I just wish the game did. Like many licensed beat-'em-ups of the day, it tried to be *Final Fight*, but lacked the style and polish to really compete.

It's a shame, too, because Software Creations obviously loved *The Tick*—maybe even the comics in addition to the TV show—and put a lot of great cameos and nice touches into the game. The Tick even has an amusing flick move to finish off enemies, and he yells "SPOON!" to end a level. You also get guest appearances from other memorable characters throughout the game, like Arthur, Die Fledermaus, and American Maid, and showdowns with the Idea Men and the Thrakkorzog.

The highlight guest appearance for me is Captain Lemming, who is literally about a twenty-second joke in the first episode of the show. But here? Look out from above! He is a recurring obstacle to dodge—very funny, and very on-target for the source material. But then some things are a little too on-target, especially to begin the game. A level called "The Night of a Million Zillion Ninjas" kicks off the game, and it entirely lives up to its name. On the one hand, that is funny, but from a gameplay perspective it is way too repetitive and boring. You are basically fighting ninjas for the first five levels, and by that point you are probably checked out for good. I know I was. – Chris Baker

Time Slip

Publisher: Vic Tokai.
Developer: Sales Curve Interactive.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Tirmatian astronomers have discovered that a temporal rift in space/time is heading for their home planet. Since Tirmat is on the brink of destruction, the Tirmatians devise a plan to conquer Earth, the nearest inhabitable planet. They travel back in time, before Earth developed sophisticated weapons, to five different time zones of Earth's history. After learning of the Tirmatian plan, the leaders of Earth send some men back in time via a prototype travel system. The entire human assault force is immediately destroyed, save Vincent Gilgamesh.

Time Slip puts you in the role of Gilgamesh, a doctor who also happens to be good with weapons. You will work your way through six levels of run-and-gun action, shooting and avoiding tons of reptilian shapeshifters, giant bosses, and brainwashed Earthlings. Levels include Medieval Britain, The Cretaceous Period, Ancient Egypt, Ancient Rome, The Recent Past, and Modern Day Tirmat. In addition to your standard firing implement, you can pick up grenades, bazookas, bubble bursters, smart bombs, 3-way guns, time bombs, shields, and shots, which increase your standard firing power. You can also pick up items to increase the energy and power of your Time Suit.

At certain points throughout the game you will ride a jet-bike. You will also solve a few minor puzzles. Instead of one-hit deaths as in *Contra* you have a life bar, but there are no continues, cheat codes, or saves, and there is no easy mode, making for a sturdy challenge.

Notable Quotable:

"Contains a few Contra-dictions, maybe too few. Its style mirrors *Contra III*, although its graphics won't send you into a battle frenzy." – *GamePro* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Somewhat repetitive . . . standard run-and-gun over platforms with enemies that sometimes spawn endlessly off-screen . . . sound and music are pretty decent . . . The graphics do well in the level detail, but the sprites suffer a little. The controls take a little time to get used to, with an eight-direction firing radius unless you are on the ground. Then it's just fire all directions up or belly to the ground and fire straight ahead. Overall, it's a good game." – Vizzed Board (www.vizzed.com)

Time Trax

Publisher: Malibu Games.
Developer: Malibu Interactive.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Based on the science-fiction TV series (1993–1994) starring Dale Midkiff, *Time Trax* casts you as Captain Darien Lambert, Fugitive Retrieval Officer. From the future, you must travel back to 1993 to thwart the plans of twenty-second-century enemies. What this amounts to is a challenging but fairly standard platform shooter in which you run, jump, duck, and climb through such areas as a construction site, a jungle, and a warehouse (there are seven levels in all), punching, kicking, and shooting such enemies as spiders, snakes, security guards, scientists, paratroopers, bosses, laser-firing machines, guys wielding flamethrowers, and projectile-firing robots.

You will also swing on pipes and vines (to reach otherwise unreachable items), avoid such obstacles as falling cinder blocks and swinging wrecking balls, and initiate a "time stall" feature that slows everything but your character down. In addition, there are scenes where you will commandeer a vehicle, such as when you ride a motorcycle left to right while firing an upgradable gun at a helicopter that is firing down at you. There is a similar scenario on a jet ski. In between levels you will receive mission briefings from Selma, your holographic companion who lives in your wallet disguised as a credit card.

Your overall objective is to track down fugitives, including evil scientist Mordicai Sahmbi and assassin Sepp Dietrich. The game has a different soundtrack than the unreleased Genesis version, which surfaced in ROM form in 2013.

Notable Quotable:
"Battle through time and Washington D.C. in an attempt to subdue one of the future's worst criminals. Tons of hidden items but most of the game is just run and shoot." – *Game Players* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"*Time Trax* is a straightforward platformer that sticks to the 16-bit platforming formula rather than innovate. While the time manipulation mechanic is a nice idea, it's not implemented well at all. From what I've read and played, it manages to do a decent job of the overall theme of the TV show, which is really all one can ask for. In a nutshell, *Time Trax* is essentially the disposable camera of SNES games. It's good for a few hours, but in the end you'll just forget about it and move on to another one." – SwankWorld (www.swankworld.com)

Timecop

Publisher: JVC.
Developer: Cryo Interactive Entertainment.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

A sequel of sorts to the 1994 movie of the same name, *Timecop* puts you in the Jean-Claude Van Damme role of time enforcement officer Max Walker, walking, jumping, and battling your way through fifteen timed levels, including Wall Street in 1929, Germany during World War II, Washington, DC in 2005, and Los Angeles in 2117. There is a jetpack duel over Los Angeles, along with a submarine shooter stage under the San Andreas Fault.

You begin the game in an industrial area, and you will be impressed right away by the digitized characters and backgrounds (there is digital speech as well, just not a lot). Character movements are awkward, especially some of Walker's fighting moves, which include punch, uppercut, high kick, jump kick, and sweep kick, the last of which is easily the most effective. Walker is equipped with a gun, but ammo is scarce. Enemies and obstacles include mobsters, soldiers, street punks, and the like.

After you lose your last life the game mocks you with text reading "you lose," the main villain Dr. Hans Kleindast laughing at you, and large "Game Over" text that moves up and down. This just adds insult to an already poor game.

Notable Quotable:

"*Timecop* has two difficulty levels: Hard and Impossible. Breakaway floors, surprise enemies, and unseen obstacles will have you glancing at your watch one time too many." – *GamePro* (March 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Generally, a game packed with animation is a good thing, but here it just adds to the game's laundry list of problems. Everything is played on a one-dimensional plane like a standard platformer while combat is in the same vein as any beat-'em-up. The key problem here is that the combat is broken on every level. Each animation routine plays through in an agonizingly slow fashion, giving each of the enemies an advantage. The most powerful move at Max's disposal is an uppercut. If he tried this move in a boxing match, even the most inexperienced boxer would blast him with a right cross . . . he also snagged a gun, but failed to bring a decent amount of ammunition . . . Even if our hero could land every shot he wanted to, he would be dead in a matter of minutes anyway. Everything hurts this guy. Steam, short falls, off-screen enemies, elevators, etc." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:

You learn a lot of interesting things while writing about video games based on comic books. For example, did you know the 1994 film *Timecop* starring Jean-Claude Van Damme was based on a comic book? Or that there was a *Timecop* game for SNES based on said property that has very little to do with either the comic or the film that it is based on?

I only discovered *Timecop* in recent years, having ordered it online for $10 from someone who obviously did not know it is a hard game to find. I discovered that it is hilariously bad, so much so that I would almost recommend everyone who has an SNES to check it out. From the second you start and are introduced to the main villain, whom I assume was one of the game developers dressing up as a mad scientist for a day, you think you are in for something special.

Then you get into the actual game to see it is another case of *Pit-Fighter*/*Mortal Kombat* syndrome where digitized actors replace sprites, and you can tell most of the budget for the game probably went into finding someone who looked just enough like Jean-Claude Van Damme if you squint hard enough. Words do not do *Timecop* justice—it really has to be seen to be believed. – Blair Farrell

Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games, Disney's

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Tiertex.
Game Type: Multi-Game Compilation, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1997.

Unlike many Disney-related 16-bit games, *Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games*—featuring characters from *The Lion King*—is not a lush, expansive platformer. Rather, it is an uninspired collection of mediocre to mildly enjoyable mini-games recommended for younger players.

In Burper, Pumbaa maneuvers along the bottom of the screen, burping upward at falling fruit, jungle bugs, gorillas, and other objects, including kitchen sinks (get it?—everything including the kitchen sink). If bugs bypass Pumbaa they can crawl along the ground and bite Pumbaa, who also gets hurt when a falling object hits him. To defeat the bugs on the ground Pumbaa can swat them away with his tail. There are big burps and mondo burps, the latter of which are bigger and drain your burping power faster, but there are no power-ups. The game is playable, but gets old after a few levels.

Jungle Pinball is a non-scrolling game of basic pinball with a few twists. By holding a button down to coil a snake (the longer you hold it down the tighter the snake will coil) on the right side of the screen you launch a pill bug (that acts as a ball) onto the playing field. You use left and right flippers—controllable with the L and R buttons, respectively—to keep the ball in play as it goes into tunnels and up ramps, hits targets and bumpers, and even spells out Hakuna Matata. You can nudge the playfield to influence the pill bug, but nudging too much will tilt the game. The pill bug rolls out the side ramps frequently, making this easily the hardest game in the collection.

A slow target shooter with no power-ups, Slingshooter has you guiding a crosshair around the screen, slinging berries at handmade targets and such enemies as bugs, buzzards, hyenas, and snakes. You should avoid hitting friends, such as Timon and Pumbaa, but the game gets old very quickly. In Hippo Hop—a game that borrows elements of *Frogger*—you must guide Timon as he hops on hippos, logs, and other floating objects, including crocodiles, to cross the river. You should gather the goodies that appear on the floating objects, but you should avoid frogs, snakes, and hyenas. You have to turn around before you jump (unless you are in a bay at the top of the screen), making for less than dynamic controls.

Fun Fact: A *Tetris*-influenced game called Bug Drop from the original 1995 computer version of *Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games* was not included in the Super Nintendo cartridge.

Notable Quotable:

"Each game is fun, but long-term replay value may be limited by the simplicity of the gaming experience. Of the four games, Jungle Pinball is the most fun and involving, especially as you extend play." – *Nintendo Power* (October 1997)

Notable Quotable:

"Even in the best two games, I got up to level six, and then got bored and switched to something more exciting. On the PC, the format worked fine—the game represented a decent way for a kid to waste the 10 minutes between finishing their homework and being called by their mums for dinner. But on the SNES, it falls flat." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

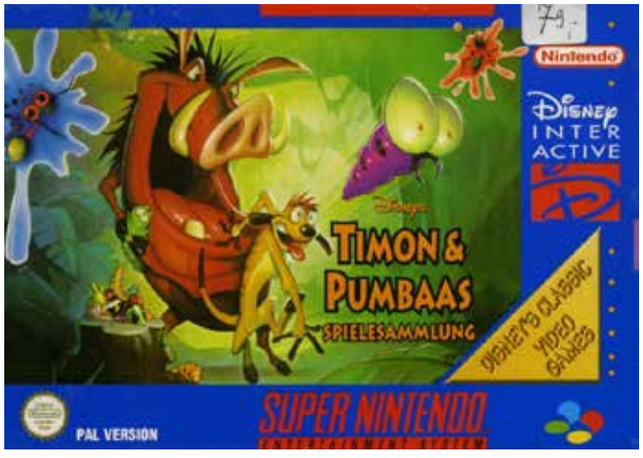
Insider Insight:

This game was a late release for the SNES—well into the reign of the PS1 and N64—so I got it when Blockbuster was liquidating their SNES cartridges (I got *Super Mario RPG* at the same time). Yes, I was still fully rocking the SNES in 1998. I also went to two Backstreet Boys concerts that year. Don't judge me; 1998 was a weird year for me, and I was only nine years old.

One of my favorite games at the time was *The Lion King*, so you better believe I was *psyched* when I found *Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games* on the cheap. I clearly remember dropping the *Pokémon* VHS that I planned to rent (dubbed not subbed, sorry folks) to the floor when I spotted the game. I had rented it at least a dozen times and could not believe my luck. Actually, my "luck" was that I was the only kid in the Bronx still playing a SNES.

Although *Jungle Games* was nothing more than a collection of mini-games, I *loved* it. None of the mini-games were particularly inventive or new (pinball, a *Frogger* clone, a *Duck Hunt* clone, a . . . *Space Invaders* clone?), but they were all well done and beautifully animated. This game is what I like to call "stupid fun"; there is nothing difficult or complex about anything in it, there is no story, there is no new gameplay from anything you have seen or done before, but it is still fun. This was the SNES grandfather of all of those Wii mini-games that came out from 2006–2011—except, you know, this was good.

Timon & Pumbaa's Jungle Games is not particularly hard to find today, so if you come across it, I recommend it as a great time waster. It is something that you don't think you will spend more than ten minutes playing, but find yourself wondering where the last hour went as you play "Timon Frogger." – Antoinette Carey



Tin Star

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Designed for use with the Super Scope rifle, the SNES Mouse, or the standard controller (which works fine), the colorfully cartoonish *Tin Star* has players guiding a cursor around areas of the Old West, firing at members of the Bad Oil Gang and at health-replenishing canteens. Unlike most games of this type, you can see the protagonist—a robot sheriff called Tin Star in this case—and maneuvering the cursor makes him aim his gun.

The fun, nicely animated action is divided into seven days (levels), including such scenarios as a train robbery, a cattle stampede, and a jail break. Days are divided into four parts, including training, where you practice shooting; action, where the basic gameplay takes place; showdown, a one-on-one quick-draw gunfight where you must shoot a "draw" icon and then your enemy; and bonus screens (acquired by not shooting a single canteen during the action stage), where you shoot at stars on a rotating board while avoiding the woman affixed to said board. Despite being developed in the UK, *Tin Star* was only released in North America.

Notable Quotable:

"*Tin Star*'s comedic twist stands out, but the jokes don't change and the gameplay's repetitive. Greenhorn desperadoes will find more pleasure here than experienced gamers." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay is challenging and entertaining, it's a treat to look at, and it has great music . . . it's a darn tootin' unqualified success. Get this if you like shooting gallery stuff." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (January 1995)

Insider Insight:

In the old days, Nintendo used to include super-cool posters with their games. They were remarkably effective at making me want to buy a ton of their stuff, and there was one from Nintendo's "Play it Loud" period that positively reeked of '90s 'tude that convinced me to get *Tin Star*. It also convinced me to get *Uniracers* and *Stunt Race FX*, so I owe a lot of good times to that poster!

Anyway, I had my mom drive me to my local Toys "R" Us to get it, and on our way home I read in the instruction manual that it was compatible with the Super NES Mouse! Sure, it also worked with the standard controller and the Super Scope, but when it came to *Tin Star*, the mouse was my controller of choice. It worked so well!

As far as target shooting games go, *Tin Star* is easily one of my favorites. The variety of stages keeps things interesting, the bright visuals are gorgeous, the music is super catchy, and the writing is hilarious. There is this bit in the game where the town is getting shot up by a bunch of male robots in drag, and since Tin Star strictly adheres to the Good Guy Code of the West he can't shoot women and children. He eventually finds a loophole that allows him to start the stage, and the conversation that leads there is still one of the funniest jokes I have ever seen in a video game. I have yet to meet anyone who loves *Tin Star* as much as I do, but for my money it is definitely worth tracking down. Just make sure you play it with the mouse! – Kris Randazzo

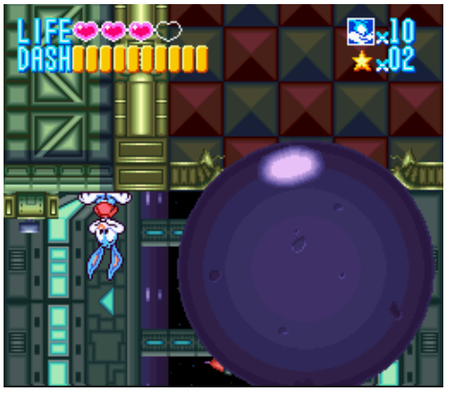
Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Based on the *Tiny Toon Adventures* cartoon series (1990–1992, plus two specials in 1994)—a collaboration between Warner Bros. Animation and Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment—this game casts you in the role of Buster Bunny, who can walk, jump, dash, and slide (while dashing). He can also do jump kicks (while dashing) and drop kicks to battle baddies. When he kicks, Buster spins, and dashing makes him move across the screen quickly and enables him to run up walls.

There are six levels of play: Big Trouble at ACME Looniversity, The Western Movie (aboard a moving train), Spook Mansion, Looniversity Football, Buster's Sky Jinks, and Space Opera. You will jump and ride on moving platforms, climb ladders and stairs, step on floor buttons to progress past certain areas, bounce on various objects, encounter enemies like Calamity Coyote, Dizzy Devil, Dr. Gene Splicer, and Montana Max, and grab helpful items, including stars (100 get you a 1-up), carrot trophies (for restoring health and increasing maximum number of health hearts), and Gogo Dodo trophies (for filling the dash gauge, becoming invincible, and turning on-screen enemies into stars).

The most unorthodox level is Looniversity Football, which is side-scrolling gridiron action. You will catch the opponent's kickoff and head to the end zone, gain a first down when you run ten yards or more downfield, catch passes thrown by Plucky (Hampton hikes the ball), and evade your opponents by jumping or sliding. There are also five between-level mini-games: Mystery Weight Challenge (compare the weight of different characters), Hungry Boy Hampton (slide panels while Hampton walks along a blue line collecting apples), Plucky Duck's Go-Go Bingo, Furrball's Championship Squash (similar to racket ball), and Find Your Friends (guide Babs in top-down action as she rescues her pals being held by Elmyra). The game was released in Japan as *Tiny Toon Adventures*.



Notable Quotable:

"Visually stunning with a great level design and adorable cartoonish sprites with equally fluid and precise animations . . . everything runs smooth and without noticeable slowdowns . . . Konami voted for the 'drop-kick' attack instead of Mario's standard 'smack-on-the-head' formula—they wanted to be different. But in practice, it doesn't really work out all that well, and the drop-kick is awkward to use. The dash is a fun gameplay mechanic, but some levels heavily rely on it (such as the unforgiving auto-scrolling train chase from the second level) which leads to countless very unfair deaths." – Video Game Den (www.videogameden.com)

Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose

Notable Quotable:

"*Tiny Toon Adventures* is one of those games that, like Capcom's *Mickey's Magical Quest*, you can tell is going to be good stuff from the moment the attract sequence first pops up on screen. It's also—like *Mickey's Magical Quest*—one of those games that changes in style from level to level. While most of it is platform-based, each section is distinctly different from what went before—it's often a complete surprise finding out what's next. The first 10 minutes, for instance, will see you dashing through the halls of Acme Looniversity, breaking into the basement of what looks like an art museum, meeting a Tiny Toon version of the Tasmanian Devil ('Dizzy Devil'), skipping over a skipping rope, and running along the roof of a speeding train—a more varied collection you couldn't really hope for." – *Super Play* (March 1993)

Insider Insight:

Every now and again, the gamers in the DeMarco family have debates and conversations about games of our youth, and this one in particular seems to happen every time we convene, raising questions as to if anyone is paying attention to what I say.

"Is the 'Tiny Toons' football game on the NES?"

"That's what it's called, right, 'Tiny Toons Football'?"

Telling my brother and cousin that they are indeed both incorrect (again) and informing them that the game is on the SNES and not called "Tiny Toons Football" is almost a yearly ritual, like paying taxes and getting a cold. The most unfortunate part about it is how they have zeroed in on a single stage, believing that the whole game is nothing but Buster and Acme University battling their rivals on the gridiron. Of course, another game in the Tiny Toons canon, *Wacky Sports Challenge*, does not keep this conundrum from happening.

Buster Busts Loose was a fine part of my days of Saturday morning cartoons, summers with my cousins, and moments of pure '90s bliss, all wrapped up in a sleepover blanket with friends. If there are any totals on how many times we rented this game I would like to know, because this definitely tops the list of games we never ended up owning but always seemed to have around.

Obviously, this game left more of an impression on me than my delusional childhood playmates, who are still waiting for "Tiny Toons Football Remastered" for the Nintendo Switch. – Nick DeMarco

Insider Insight:

Any video game fan who grew up in the '90s probably remembers their first issue of *Nintendo Power*. Maybe it was the first one with a clay Mario, or perhaps one about a Legend of Zelda game, but for me the first issue I actually got to take home (as opposed to thumbing through at a drug or department store while my parents shopped) featured a cover story for *Tiny Toon Adventures: Buster Busts Loose*.

Tiny Toon Adventures was one of my favorite cartoons at the time, and I had a Buster and Babs Bunny doll that I took everywhere I went. So for me, *Buster Busts Loose* was as exciting as any *Final Fantasy* or first-party Nintendo game. I did not own a copy of *BBL* until I was in my twenties—not for a lack of begging my parents for one, but it was a game I rented frequently, and it is a game that still holds up today.

Konami was one of the all-time great third-party developers of the 16-bit era with their own IP, but it can't be overstated how good their licensed output was. In the case of *Buster Busts Loose*, it was a bright, colorful platformer with a lot of variety that captured the essence of the source material near perfectly. Each of the game's six levels was like binge watching the cartoon, and each was set up as if it were a production being put on by the characters from the show. I especially enjoy the fourth stage, which is a football game (the only digital one I'm good at), and the final one, which is inspired by the *Star Wars* spoof from the show, complete with Duck Vader as the boss. – Blair Farrell

Tiny Toon Adventures: Wacky Sports Challenge

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: Konami.
Game Type: Sports/Olympics, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Based on the *Tiny Toon Adventures* cartoon series (1990–1995) executive produced by Steven Spielberg, *Wacky Sports Challenge* lets you control Buster Bunny, Babs Bunny, Plucky Duck, or Dizzy Devil in a variety of cute, colorful, fun, Olympic-style events.

In Ice Cream Throw you, viewing the action from behind the contestants, throw ice cream at round face targets (mostly Max Montana) that pass by. In the Chicken Dash, which is viewed from the side, you use a power gauge to set the strength of a rubber band around your waist and run toward the cliff at Acme Canyon, trying to stop as close to the edge as possible (you can only brake once). Weightlifting takes place at the TV station, where you use the power gauge to lift a barbell before the other characters. Saucer Throw, which is at the Acme Airport, has you using the power gauge to turn in a circle, then determining the angle of the throw and letting go while being careful not to throw the disc out of bounds. The top half of the screen shows your character from behind while the bottom half gives a side view of the action.

The game also features an Obstacle Course, where you run up the screen, dodging and jumping over obstacles; and Birdman Contest, where you take to the skies on a broom (viewed from behind), flying as fast as you can while grabbing balloon-like targets. If you grab enough of these floating spheres you will climb a wire (hoisted down from an airplane) and then become airborne again, flying downward while aiming for Montana Max's mansions. Other games include Pole Vault, Log Cutting, Swimming (in the Acme ocean), Bungee Jump, Hammer Bash, and Freestyle Skiing. There are four difficulty levels: easy, normal, hard, and super.

The game is noteworthy and unusual for being a character-based title that lets four gamers play at the same time. Known as *Tiny Toon Adventures: Wild & Wacky Sports* in Europe and *Tiny Toon Adventures: Dotabata Daiundoukai* in Japan. Followed by the similarly titled *Tiny Toon Adventures: Wacky Sports* for the Game Boy, which features baseball, basketball, football, mini-golf, soccer, and tennis.

Notable Quotable:
"With cool graphics, good sound, excellent control, and fun gameplay, the Tiny Toons take the grand prize with this Wacky Sports adventure." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"The controls are good and responsive, but like a lot of games of this type you better darn well have strong thumbs, because during some of the events you will find yourself having to batter two buttons as fast as you possibly can in order to win." – Kerr9000's Blog (kerr9000.blogspot.com)

Insider Insight:
When *Tiny Toon Adventures: Wacky Sports Challenge* was new I was an eight- or nine-year-old little leaguer, and *Tiny Toon Adventures* was a big deal—everyone in school was watching it. Everyone except me, that is. I wasn't really a fan of the show because I was never huge into *Looney Tunes*. One day after baseball practice I went to my friend Danny's house, and he had just gotten a copy of the game. Since it was one of his only multi-player titles that was not a baseball sim or *Street Fighter II* we gave it a play, despite my disinterest in the franchise.

Much to my surprise, I discovered that I really enjoyed it. The cart consisted of a bunch of cool mini-games, and the competition was fierce between me and Danny. For a long time after that *Wacky Sports Challenge* remained in steady rotation on the SNES, whether we were at his house or mine. It was such a blast that sometimes my younger sister and his older brother would want to get in on the action, and we would all take turns playing against each other.

After spending so much time with the game I got to know the characters better and began watching the show on a regular basis. As I watched I enjoyed it more and more, and I began to understand some of the inside jokes in the game, which made the experience that much more fun. When I play the game nowadays, I get flooded with nostalgia for a simpler time in my life when I was a carefree kid, totally absorbed by the adventures of Buster Bunny and the gang. – Raymond Fix

TKO Super Championship Boxing

Publisher: SOFEL.
Developer: Sting.
Game Type: Sports/Boxing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Though not as well-known as such titles as *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!* for the NES or *James "Buster" Douglas Knockout Boxing* for the Genesis, *TKO Super Championship Boxing* is an enjoyable game bolstered by colorful graphics, good sound effects, and simple and efficient controls. In Championship mode, you select one of the eight boxers and compete in a series of one-on-one bouts against the other seven, trying to become World Champion.

As you throw hooks and jabs, trying to land enough hits to knock out your opponent, your stamina will decrease with each punch, as denoted by a boxing glove meter. If you punch too frequently the meter will empty and you will be unable to punch for a few moments, preventing you from button-mashing your way to success. After each tournament bout you can exercise (jump rope, punch the sandbag, lift weights, etc.) your boxer to build up his foot speed, punching speed, endurance, and strength, giving the game a boost in the depth department. Options include number of rounds (1 to 10) and three difficulty levels: novice, advanced, and expert. The boxing rink is viewed from the side and scrolls a little to the left and right to follow the action.

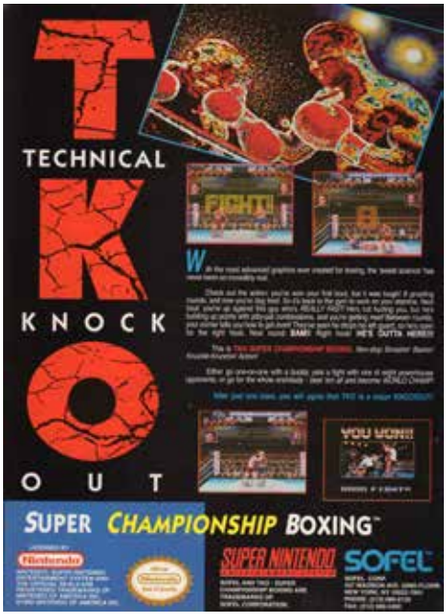
The Japanese version, called *Kentou-Ou World Champion* (*King Boxer World Champion*), has a story mode that features real-life Japanese boxer and bantamweight champion Jirou Matsushima. He appears on the box art for the Super Famicom game.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the best boxing games out there." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1995, Adventure Press)

Notable Quotable:

Matches in this game are more about boxer positioning than where your punches are landing. That might be part of the reason I don't care for the fighting too much, or I'm not picking up on the subtleties. It's not bad, just basic . . . Training is merely a menu selection, and if you lose a match, it's game over. You can't continue on and keep improving your boxer, making the mode less interesting and more gamey . . . Championship mode is a standard arcade mode with some customization." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)



TNN Bass Tournament of Champions

Publisher: American Softworks.
Developer: GAPS.
Game Type: Sports/Fishing, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Licensed by the now-defunct Nashville Network, *TNN Bass Tournament of Champions* is similar to *Super Black Bass*, with players trying to catch as many bass as possible (other types of fish should be avoided). There are six different lakes—North, South, East, West, Salt, and Fresh—with hundreds of fishing spots. When play begins, you can go to the Bass Pro Shop (where you purchase tackle and lures), engage in a little Free Fishing, or enter the Junior tournament. Placing third or better in Junior mode will let you go to the ASC tournament, while placing in the ASC will let you compete in the TNN tournament.

Piloting around the lake is viewed from overhead, while casting your lure puts you behind your fisherman. After you cast the line (a casting power bar determines the power of the cast) the view switches to overhead. There are a number of options that help make the game simulate real fishing, including seasons, weather conditions (sunny, cloudy, rainy, stormy, and foggy), and wind force (light, medium, and heavy). You can select the time of day you want to fish, and you should be careful not to snag or snap your line.

The Genesis version of the game, which was developed by Imagitec Design, has a number of differences, such as a side-view of your fisherman (in a window on the right side of the screen) while he is casting. Followed by *TNN Outdoors Bass Tournament '96* (Genesis).

Notable Quotable:

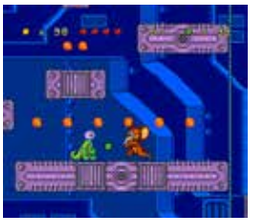
"Bass fans will appreciate the detailed graphics and realistic controls which accurately simulate the sport. It's fun and there's no smell or messy fish to clean—cast away!" – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Fishing's fun, but it requires patience. Unfortunately, *Bass Tournament of Champions* makes you wait too long for a good time. Great attention to bass-fishing details makes *BTOC* a kick for fanatic worm-dunkers, but if you don't care what a Texas rig is, forget it. You also have to reel in the lures very slowly (too slowly!) to get a nibble. At least, thanks to top-notch controls, you can have fun casting hardware and fighting a fish when you finally hook one. The graphics are keepers, too, especially the close-up overhead visuals for 'playing' hooked fish. However, the sounds sink—unless you enjoy fishing to elevator music." – *GamePro* (January 1995)

Tom and Jerry

Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions.
Developer: Riedel Software Productions.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1993.



In *Tom and Jerry*, the lively cat and mouse team are stranded at the theater after having watched the premiere of their new 1991 feature film, *Tom and Jerry: The Movie*. Players must guide a running, jumping Jerry through four multi-stage levels: The Theater (The Marquee, Inside the Project, Inside the Theater), The Junk Yard, The Toy Store, and The House (The Kitchen, The Living Room).

Jerry will throw marbles at and jump on such enemies as mosquitoes, towering teddy bears, junkyard rats, sci-fi movie monsters, and giant roaches, and he will dodge, jump over, or otherwise avoid such obstacles as gum, popcorn, rivets, flames, dripping pipes, junk raining down from above, and bouncing balls. Jerry will also bounce on springs, collect cheese bits (100 grants an extra life) and cheese wedges (for health), grab marbles (ammo), use floor buttons to move building-block pieces to plug up holes, operate toaster levers, go for a dip in the aquarium, and ride moving film strips and floating platforms. There are four boss battles, each a one-on-one confrontation with Tom, who drops sandbags and rivets, unleashes windup robots, and tries to grab Jerry with his paw. In the two-player alternating mode, player one is Jerry while player two is Tuffy, Jerry's baby nephew. Gamers take turns trying to complete each stage.

Although this is an easy game aimed at younger players, there are blind jumps. Sometimes this will result in death, but simple memorization will get you through these specific points the next time through. The character animation, though not quite on par with the classic cartoons, is impressive, and the visuals are excellent, with shading and texturing enhancing the game's cartoon-like appearance. The music, on the other hand, is too simplistic, like a child learning a new song on a synthesizer.

Notable Quotable:

"The competent yet often uninspired Hanna-Barbera cartoon series is now a competent yet often uninspired video game . . . very small players may get a kick out of guiding mouse Jerry through nemesis Tom's none-too-wily traps." – *Entertainment Weekly* (April 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The boss fights with Tom are reasonably challenging. Tom, true to cat form, is a crafty adversary capable of envisioning mouse traps that would make Rube Goldberg cry tears of envy . . . The control is fortunately accessible to children, with the major involvements being walking, jumping, and throwing small green marbles . . . While it takes a little time to get used to some peculiarly slippery terrains, the majority of the game entails ledge-hopping and learning to aim your marbles at smaller enemies or foes above you, things that aren't too hard for anyone to learn in a couple of minutes . . . Flashy, but yet still poor presentation can't stop *Tom and Jerry* from being nothing but a thin shell of the game it could have been. Movie merchandising got the better of this cartridge. If even an inkling of the drive put into fine-tuning the stunning graphics and precise control had been put into the conception of some of the less superficial aspects of the gameplay, *T&J* might well have been one of the most underrated platformers of all time. As it stands, it's a shiny object for the baby to play with and nothing more." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)

Tommy Moe's Winter Extreme: Skiing & Snowboarding

Publisher: Electro Brain.
Developer: Loriciel.
Game Type: Sports/Skiing/Snowboarding, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1994.

Viewed from a behind-the-skier perspective, *Tommy Moe's Winter Extreme* lets players ski or snowboard down three types of courses. In Downhill, gamers race down a mountain as fast as possible, passing through checkpoints in the allotted time to keep going and make it to the finish line. Slalom has a similar premise, with players trying to reach the finish line, but there are gates to pass through. Giant Slalom has a longer path than Slalom, plus more twists, turns, and other obstacles.

Along with the three challenge modes there is Freestyle mode, which lets you take your time as you ski or snowboard, avoiding rocks, trees, fellow skiers and snowboarders, and other obstacles. In Freestyle, when you reach the bottom of the hill you must ride the ski lift to the top of the next mountain. Conditions vary as you go, ranging from dawn to dusk to darkness, and you can even ski through a winter storm. The game also features a Training mode and an Olympics-style Competition mode.

Fun Fact: In addition to being endorsed by former World Cup alpine ski racer Tommy Moe, this game is endorsed by Val-d'Isère, the skiing location that hosted the 1992 Winter Olympics. The Japanese version features an endorsement from Nordica, an Italian ski equipment company.

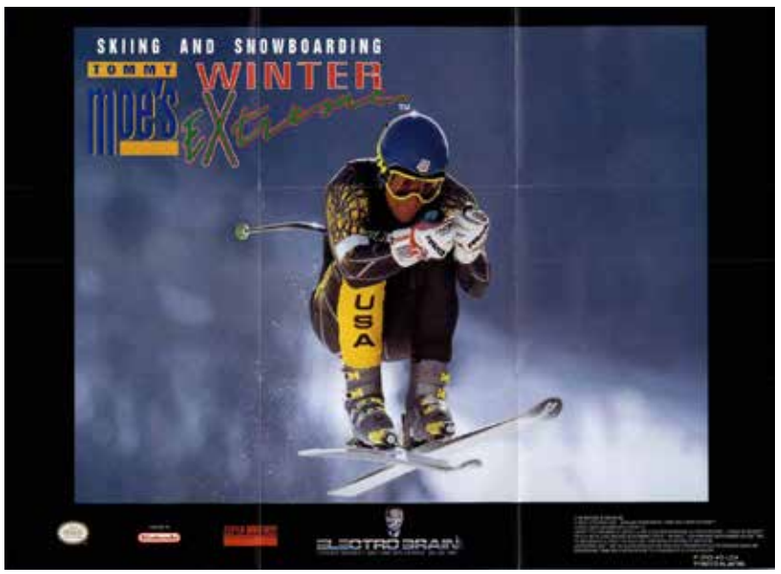
Notable Quotable:

"An extremely realistic and fast ski and snowboarding simulation. Unfortunately, there are only so many times you can ski down a mountain before you get bored." – *Game Players* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Despite the name on the cartridge, Olympic gold medalist Tommy Moe is nowhere to be found. Still, the skiing action is unbelievable,

whether you're zooming down hills or catching air off moguls. A fabulous game hurt by misleading packaging." – *Entertainment Weekly* (June 1994)



Tony Meola's Sidekicks Soccer

Publisher: Electro Brain.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Developed by the same team responsible for *NCAA Basketball*, *Tony Meola's Sidekicks Soccer* uses similar Mode 7 rotation techniques to give gamers the perspective of being behind the ball at all times when on offense. Defense, which tracks the character you are controlling with a cursor, can be a little trickier to manage than the fantastic offensive perspective, but it gets easier with repeated play. The game, which is endorsed by the titular American goalkeeper during the 1994 FIFA World Cup, is filled with realistic options and features, including headers, corner kicks, slide tackles, roster alterations, varying formations, special plays, and more.

Sidekicks Soccer has the expected modes, such as Exhibition and Season, and you can select from sixty-four different soccer teams (no licensing is involved), including city and world teams, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Though not as big of a kick as Nintendo's *Super Soccer*, this soccer sim definitely has game. However, long passwords and scarcity of text in the menu screens can get annoying.

In Japan the game is called *Ramos Rui no World Wide Soccer*, as it was endorsed by Japan national team member Ruy Ramos, a midfielder. In Latin America it is called *Super Copa*, after the Copa América football association of South America.

Notable Quotable:
"A super-fast paced, 8-meg simulation for one or two players that's also easy to learn. There's a wide diversity of scoring, but defensive play falls short." – *Game Players* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"This game adds a new and different perspective to the usual home video soccer game, but the gameplay can get very confusing at times. Yet, there are plenty of options to interest veteran video game sports fans." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1993)

Top Gear

Publisher: Kemco.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics.
Game Type: Sports Car Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Top Gear is an arcade-style, split-screen racing game that lets one or two players race on thirty-two tracks (many of which seem similar) in eight different parts of the world: United States, Italy, Brazil, Japan, Germany, Scandinavia, France, and the United Kingdom. Gamers select from four different five-gear cars—Cannibal, Razor, Weasel, and Sidewinder—each rated for speed, acceleration, tire traction, and gas mileage. The objective is to finish among the top five (out of twenty) cars in each race, and players are given three nitro speed boosts (which you should use on straightaways) per outing.

Fuel management is a key to success, so you should refuel at pit stops when necessary—partially or totally, depending on your need. Avoiding road obstacles, such as stones, rows, and iron plates, and driving at night, where visibility is reduced, add to the fun and challenge, and the game is super fast with no slowdown. Three difficulty settings are available: amateur, professional, and championship. In the higher level you encounter more course obstacles and more blocking by other cars. If you hit an obstacle it costs you time, which is critical. *Top Gear* for the SNES is nothing like Universal's 1984 laser disc arcade game of the same name. Known as *Top Racer* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:
"*Top Gear* can become a bit repetitive with fairly similar tracks and, after a while, predictable competition. But that doesn't make it any less addictive." – *N-Force* (July 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"*Top Gear* offers the incredible speed of *F-Zero*, and some of the best split-screen auto racing action ever to hit a home system . . . The pace never slows and the tracks dish out enough variety to hold even the most diehard speed king's interest. The computer opponents provide a solid challenge. The game even has some super cool background music." – *GamePro* (May 1992)

Top Gear

Insider Insight:
Before the Stig was an international celebrity there was *Top Gear* for the Super Nintendo. It was one of the first racing games for the Super NES and one of the few console games up until that point to feature two-player simultaneous racing.

Following in the tracks of classic driving games like *Outrun* and *Rad Racer*, the game allowed players to race head-to-head on thirty-two scenic tracks in cities around the globe from Las Vegas to London as they competed for the championship of the world. *Top Gear* was innovative in its use of a nitro boost and included hilarious dialogue bubbles to narrate the action—"WHAT THE HELL??" or "LATER GEEK!"

Though there is no connection to the long-running and much-beloved BBC motoring show of the same name, the 16-bit *Top Gear* video game was also created in the UK. Founded by Ian Stewart and Kevin Norburn, Sheffield-based Gremlin Graphics (later Gremlin Interactive) had a storied history of development for the ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64 with winning games like *Wanted: Monty Mole* and *Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension*.

Gremlin also developed the critically acclaimed Lotus series of racing games for the Commodore Amiga, and the awesome MIDI music in *Top Gear* is heavily indebted to its score. There are other similarities, including the split-screen graphics.

The series raced into the '90s with *Top Gear 2* and *Top Gear 3000*, but the original *Top Gear* was the most influential, and is for many Millennials the first racing game they remember playing, making it a must-have addition to any SNES collection. Gear up and go for it! – Van Burnham

Insider Insight:
When I was in junior high school, my group of friends and I were all serious SNES gamers, and my buddy Brian was probably the most skilled. He could hang with anyone in brawlers like *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*, and he lapped the field in solving lengthy adventures like *Secret of Mana* and *The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past*. (Perhaps it is no surprise with such talents that today he is a software engineer at Microsoft.) The game at which he truly excelled the most, at least in relation to me, was *Top Gear*—I simply could not beat him at it—never ever, not even once. I truly can't recall even a single instance of it happening.

True, Brian owned the game and I didn't. But even after borrowing it from him and practicing like crazy, I still could not finish ahead of him on the racetrack. It's not like I was a driving game rookie: I could win *Rad Racer* on the NES, hold my own in *F-Zero* for Super Nintendo, and usually clock multiple continues on *Pole Position* and *Out Run* in the arcades. But *Top Gear* against Brian always had me stumped. Why?

It would be an easy excuse to chalk it up to circumstances, or perhaps blame the game setup (as even two competing players cooperate against the CPU). And I never felt comfortable with the track's split-screen perspective. Yet I could advance single-player to the more challenging courses, and at least sometimes place ahead of others face-to-face. Just never ahead of Brian. He genuinely was that good. Brian excelled at most SNES games he played, and with *Top Gear* upped it to mastery. In reality, I hardly had a fighting chance. There was one upside: he was always willing to tell me the game's upper-level passwords—not a bad consolation! – Shane Stein

Top Gear 2

Publisher: Kemco.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics.
Game Type: Sports Car Racing, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

The biggest improvement *Top Gear 2* has over the original *Top Gear* is its one-player mode, which offers a full-screen perspective, giving you a larger viewpoint of the action (two player remains split-screen). Also nice is the fact that placing among the top six finishers in races now lets you earn money to upgrade your car's engine, tires, shocks, gearbox (automatic and manual), and nitrous induction systems. You can also purchase front, rear, and side armor that helps you keep from spinning out when hit.

The racing, which is viewed from a third-person perspective behind your car, takes place in sixteen parts of the world: Australasia, France, Ireland, South America, Britain, Germany, Italy, Spain, Canada, Greece, Japan, Switzerland, Egypt, India, Scandinavia, and the United States. Each area has four different tracks for a total of sixty-four different circuits.

As you race around the twisting, turning tracks you must contend with obstacles (rocks, logs, road signs, and trash cans), other cars, and such new-to-the-series weather conditions as rain, fog, and snow. You can grab three types of power-ups scattered along the tracks: nitro (speed boosts you can use at any time), speed-up (instant speed boosts), and money. You can customize your car's paint job for each race. This game has better graphics and controls than its Genesis counterpart (which lacks a fuel gauge). Similar to *Lotus Turbo Challenge* (Genesis).

Notable Quotable:

"*Top Gear* is one of my favorite racing games, just for the fun of it. The sequel maintains the fun while adding several more elements, and improving the graphics and sound . . . my current favorite racing game on the market today. I will admit the graphics are not quite as sharp as some of the flashy games out there, but you can't beat the play control of this cart." – *Game Zero* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The excellent road gives a great sensation of speed, and the two-player mode is especially good fun, with a player who's lagging behind by miles suddenly shooting into the lead because he's been saving up all his nitros. But perceptive players will soon spot that all you're really doing is keeping your thumb on the accelerator while weaving from side to side for hour after hour, which will induce boredom before too long." – *Super Play* (November 1993)

Insider Insight:

It took a lot to pull me away from *Super Mario Kart* when I was growing up, but after mastering all the short cuts and game modes, the slow pace of it left me wanting more. I got *Top Gear 2* for my birthday and remember curiously looking at the box in anticipation of playing it. I had rented the first game in the series, and it had sparked an interest in more realistic driving games with its pit stops to refill your gas tank, and the nitros you could use as you wanted.

After the party, when we were allowed some time to play, it did not take long for me to grow fond of the title. I loved the idea of faster cars, being able to upgrade your engine and tires, and even the addition of weather as a factor in racing strategy. These elements gave the game a feeling of realism for a kid too young to drive. I remember always choosing manual transmission at the options screen. I was too young to really know what I was doing, but I was able to figure it out, and I still choose that option on most games to this day when it is available.

Top Gear 2 takes you on a road trip through some of the most iconic cities in the world, and the changing weather really makes a difference in the way you drive and the way your car handles. It is small details like these that make the game enjoyable. Even the comments your driver makes as he passes opponents on the track telling the other drivers to eat his dust is satisfying, especially when the person you passed is your best friend you are competing with to win the series.

Top Gear 2 is definitely an improvement over the original while staying true to what made that game great. While it might not be the best racer on the platform, it is definitely worth picking up to burn a few hours when you are feeling nostalgic for some classic 16-bit, arcade-style fun. –Anthony J. La Gambina

Top Gear 3000

Publisher: Kemco.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics.
Game Type: Sports Car Racing, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

Rather than simply release a "Top Gear 3" set in the present day, the programmers of the third game in the *Top Gear* trilogy went futuristic with *Top Gear 3000*, which takes place in a negative utopia (as opposed to a dystopian future, where everything is bad). The year is 2962, an era that suppresses freedom of thought and expression in the name of calm and peaceful coexistence among denizens of the twelve Star Systems under the jurisdiction of The Galactic Conglomerate of Unified Planets. Most forms of fun have been eliminated (or at least watered down), so "outlaw thrill seekers" such as yourself have created an illegal racing tournament.

You will race on forty-eight alien tracks of varying conditions (clear, icy, dry, humid, foggy, and the like) spread over the twelve Star Systems; full-screen or split-screen in one-player mode, or split-screen only in two-player simultaneous competitive Championship Mode. With a multi-tap adapter, four gamers can compete at once in VS Mode via a four-way split-screen. You can select from four different cars—The Cheetah, The Demon, The Phantom, and The Pegasus—each rated according to acceleration speed, maximum speed, and boost.

Scattered on the tracks are various pick-ups, including money credits, speed boosts, and other secret bonuses. You can also drive over special zones that affect your car in different ways, such as automatic vehicle repair or recharge, vehicle space/time warp, or instant speed boosts. Placing in the top nine on races earns you credits to upgrade your car's engine (including nuclear), tires, gearbox, and armor, and to purchase boosts, jumping ability (for jumping over cars and up to airborne credits), attractors (gives you more speed by attracting you to cars ahead), warps, and infrared (allows you to see better at night). Changing the color of your car is free.

Notable Quotable:

"*Top Gear 3000* is a fairly entertaining racing game. Beyond its derivative gameplay, this game has enough secrets, bonuses, and tracks to hold your interest long enough to feel like the $50–$70 you paid for this cart was certainly not an impulse throwaway." – *Electric Playground* (September 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are above average . . . various spacey locales throughout the galaxy, though many of them look suspiciously Earthlike. The cars are big, but you only get spinouts, not wrecks. The four-player boxes make multiplayer racing easier than it is in *Street Racer*, which gives its four drivers thin, layered strips of track. The sounds are pretty ordinary. Rumbling engines and mild tire screeches rev up the action, but there are no voices or dynamic tunes to keep your ears excited . . . Adjustable difficulty and smoothly handling cars that are easy to win with make the cart a good choice for drivers who don't yet have their license. *Top Gear 3000* isn't at the top of the winner's list, but it's running fine." – *GamePro* (March 1995)

Total Carnage

Publisher: Malibu Games.
Developer: Black Pearl Software.
Game Type: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Total Carnage—the spiritual successor to *Smash T.V.*—takes players out of the game show setting and into the war-torn Middle East to the fictional country of Kookistan. Players, as Captain Carnage or Major Mayhem—both of whom are shirtless brutes—run around (up, down, left, right, and diagonally) shooting countless demons and mutant soldiers (who attack from all sides) through twenty battle zones of nonstop action. Along with your trusty machine gun you can grab grenade launchers, rocket launchers, plasma machine guns, flame-throwers, spray-fire rifles, and defensive blades. You can also drop an assortment of bombs and summon air-to-surface missiles. Other helpful items include shields, running shoes (for speed), dog tags (for extra lives), keys (for accessing special areas), and flags and gemstones (for extra points). The view is from overhead and the game is extremely difficult, but it is made a little easier (and more fun) when a second player joins in.

Compared to the arcade version of *Total Carnage* Midway released in 1992, the SNES game has smaller characters, limited continues, grainier, less colorful graphics, and of course no dual joystick control. Many of the digitized voice effects remain, but the blood has been removed (or in some cases recolored), General Akhboob promises only to "annihilate" you (as opposed to drown you in "pools of your own blood"), and Akhboob's Hitler form was removed. The graphics rarely flicker, even when the gameplay is at its most intense, and thunderous sound effects and a rocking musical score complement the action. *Super Smash T.V.*, which is the SNES version of *Smash T.V.*, mimics its coin-op cousin better, but *Total Carnage* remains a playable and even enjoyable (if repetitious) game. Also released for the Game Boy.

Fun Fact: In 2005, long after production had stopped on the Atari Jaguar, Carl Forhan of Songbird Productions ported *Total Carnage* to the console.

Notable Quotable:

"It's all about staying alive while shooting everything in sight. Sure, it's a generic arcade-action premise, but if your trigger finger is itchy, here's the scratchin' it needs." – *Game Players* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The game is pretty much *Smash T.V.* meets Operation Desert Storm . . . The four face buttons and the d-pad are solid stand-ins [for the dual joystick control]. These controls work well. Visually, the game is scaled down quite a bit from its arcade counterpart . . . The bosses aren't anywhere near as huge as they were in the arcade version . . . The game did keep its difficulty." – Joe Goes Retro (YouTube)

Insider Insight:

I don't think I ever rage-quit on any other Super Nintendo game as I did on *Total Carnage*. Since it was a follow-up to the insanity that was *Smash T.V.*, my brother and I had high hopes for it. Our hopes were only further heightened when we discovered it was constantly checked out at our local rental store. We would go week after week, looking for the game, only to have to make other choices. Finally one day the gaming gods were in our favor, and we managed to get a copy.

While it was different in some ways than its predecessor, *Total Carnage* was an insane assault on our senses. It had my brother and I firmly gripping our controllers, raging at how fast we would die. Sure, *Smash T.V.* was not an easy game either, but *Total Carnage* sent us raging away from our SNES, forcing ourselves to calm down before returning to try again. There wasn't a weekend long enough for us to dedicate to totally playing through the game. All too often we would have to give up on the game to return it, only to wait until we could find it another weekend. No matter how angry and frustrated we got, we always came back for more. In fact, since I now own the game, I still punish myself with its insanity. – Zoe K. Howard

Toy Story, Disney's

Publisher: Disney Interactive.
Developer: Traveller's Tales/Disney Interactive/Sony/Psygnosis/Pixar.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Starring the voices of Tim Allen and Tom Hanks, *Toy Story*—the first full-length feature film animated entirely on computers—was the number one box office smash of 1995. The visuals were incredible, the screenplay was sharp, and the characters and toys were charming. With help from Pixar Animated Studios, *Toy Story* the game looks uncannily similar to *Toy Story* the movie. Woody, who works his way through Andy's Room, Andy's Room Part II, Pizza Planet, Sid's Room, and Another Road Picture, is gangly and moves like a puppet, and all the toys are reproduced in faithful detail.

The CD-quality music is like a band come to life, and the trains, helicopters, airplanes, and other toys sound great. Even the levels, storyline, and format follow along closely with the action from the movie, with Woody helping the green army men move past obstacles, keeping up with Buzz Lightyear, escaping a room of terrified toys, and riding Roller Bob and a panic-stricken Rex. In the last level, Woody and Buzz hitch a ride on R.C. Car and Woody rides Buzz through the air.

The action is tricky and interesting, and each level features new strategies and challenges. Woody, who walks, ducks, jumps, swings across pitfalls, and lassoes other toys, does not move with much grace, but he's not supposed to. Somehow he manages to be mildly uncoordinated and a tad slow without dragging down the action. The game is virtually identical to the Genesis rendition, though the SNES version does have more colors, bigger characters, and looser controls. The Genesis game does have an extra level: Day-Toy-Na, an *Out Run*-like racer in which Woody rides R.C. from the moving van to Buzz. Also released for the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:
"*Toy Story* SNES has all the graphic force of the *Kong* [*Donkey Kong Country*] games (well, almost) but without the cool platform feel. The whole interactive gameplay thing coupled with some questionable mechanics (like the classic stop 'n' go stuff) kind of bother me. I think straight action platform would have been in order here." – *GameFan Magazine* (February 1996)

Notable Quotable:
"The fact that the levels are sometimes trial-and-error, and that you don't receive any continues from the start of the game, leads to multiple restarts. For some this will be frustrating, but the levels aren't all that long, and are vibrant enough to keep interest flowing. I suggest looking into this title; it's one of the best licensed games on SNES." – Game Freaks 365 (gamefreaks365.com)

Notable Quotable:
"On the plus side, this game follows the storyline of the movie rather well, depicting a good variety of levels. On the downside, the game may be too hard and frustrating for the younger players who are attracted to the movie. The levels are quite difficult, often requiring memorization to avoid instant hits. Still, it does look really good and will surely capture the appeal of the movie. Similar to the Genesis version, [but] this one is a bit harder to control. It's a good but challenging game." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1996)

Toys

Publisher: Absolute Entertainment.
Developer: Imagineering, Inc.
Game Type: Top-Down Action, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Designed by veterans David Crane and Alex Demeo, *Toys* is based on the 1992 Robin Williams feature film of the same name. The evil General Zevo has taken over the Zevo Toy Factory, manufacturing an army of deadly military toys disguised as ordinary playthings. The General's nephew, Leslie, is a kid at heart and the character players control. Using water balloons, wind-up ducks, race cars, peanut guns, soccer balls, and numerous other Good Toy weapons acquired by grabbing gift boxes, players fend off jeeps, jets, tanks, soldiers, bulldozers, exploding Elvis dolls, and other Bad Toys.

During the toy-battling action General Zevo's security cameras keep an eye on Leslie, and that ties into the goal of each of the first three levels—Toy Factory, Cafeteria, and Warehouse—to destroy all the cameras with a squirt gun. In the fourth and final level players must board an airplane, fly to the General's Command Center high above a mini-Manhattan skyline, dodge enemy bullets while piloting through recharge coils, and crash into the window of General Zevo's headquarters.

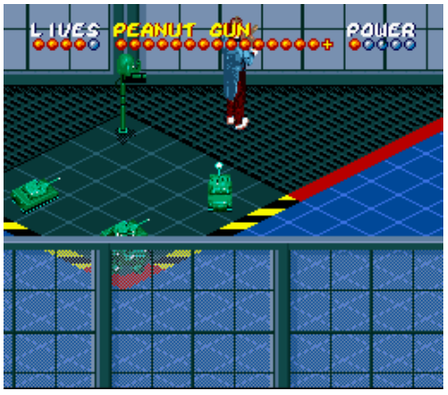
Viewed from an isometric perspective, *Toys* is mildly entertaining but hard to beat. The status bar across the top of the screen is handled as a transparency in the SNES rendition, while it's on a black background in the Genesis game. However, the Genesis version has better sound effects and music. Otherwise, the games are virtually identical.

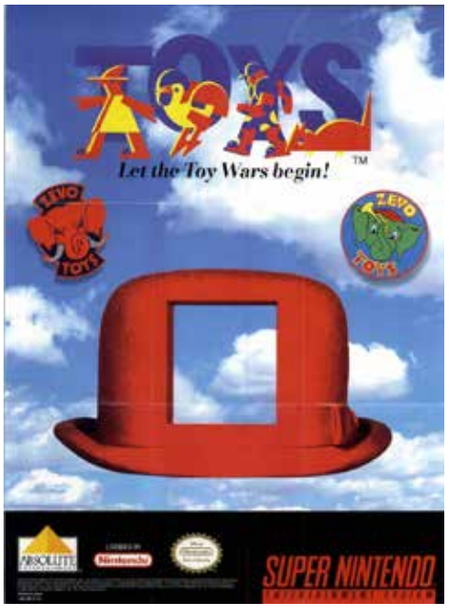
Notable Quotable:

"The game might be the only thing worse than the movie . . . it's marketed at children . . . Why is the game so hard? . . . I'm an adult, and I cannot beat the first level." – Northernlion (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"You'd better be quick on your toes (and your trigger finger) to avoid all the enemies. The graphics are okay, and the controls are pretty good, but it's too long, boring, and confusing to be good." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1995, Adventure Press)





Troddlers

Publisher: Seika/The Sales Curve.
Developer: ATOD Design.
Game Type: Adventure Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A puzzle game that is similar in concept to the much more well-known *Lemmings*, *Troddlers* has players—with the help of a character named Hokus—placing and removing blocks to create pathways for mindless little Troddlers, who are so dumb they will simply walk into fire, bombs, cannons, enemies, and other obstacles if you let them. Block types to manipulate include normal, ice, mine, flipper (flips the Troddler to the side the block's arrow is pointing to), bouncer (reflects cannonballs; Troddler will survive if it lands from a high place onto a bouncer), pauser (Troddler will start moving slower if he walks on one), and no entry (cannot be removed by Hokus or Pokus).

There are a limited number of blocks in each of the 175 timed stages and the Troddlers can walk on walls and ceilings, so strategic planning is a must. Collecting gem stones and destroying zombie Troddlers adds to the fun and challenge. Cute deaths, chipper music, and a pair of excellent two-player modes—Team (cooperative) and War (competitive)—seal the deal. (The second gamer plays as Pokus.) The graphics, while nothing fancy, are sufficiently clear and detailed for a puzzle game. SNES Mouse control is recommended for smooth game play. Adapted from the 1992 Amiga computer game.

Notable Quotable:

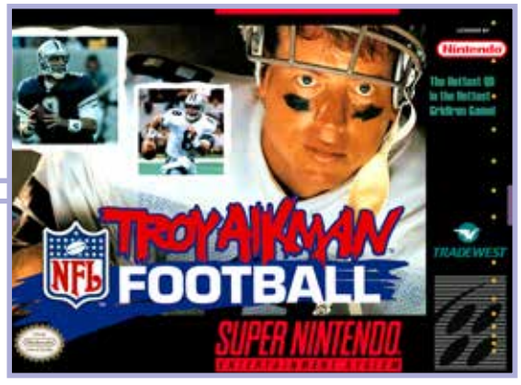
"*Troddlers* is a high-quality puzzle game with lots to offer, despite not being terribly original or exciting." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (1993)

Notable Quotable:

"*Troddlers* is a well-made puzzle game that time has completely forgotten . . . It never caught on . . . I consider this game to be one of the better puzzle games on the Super Nintendo. Maybe not as good as *Bust-A-Move* or *Tetris Attack*, but it's certainly up there . . . It has the ugliest title screen I've ever seen . . . The game starts out really easy for the first 10 levels or so, but don't let that deter you; it gets pretty challenging the further you go . . . the songs are catchy, pleasant, and really easy to listen to." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Troy Aikman NFL Football

Publisher: Tradewest.
Developer: Leland Interactive Media.
Game Type: Sports/Football, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Although Dallas Cowboys legend Troy Aikman is the only real player mentioned by name in *Troy Aikman NFL Football*, each of the twenty-eight NFL teams in this game have been rated according to position, based on stats from the '93-94 season. You can play for or against any of the teams in the Pre-Season mode, the '93-'94 Season mode, or the Custom Season mode, which lets you design your own season or recreate a season from the NFL's past. Regardless of the mode you play, there are six field surfaces to choose from: grass, mud, dirt, snow, rain, and artificial turf.

If you just want to coach, you can call all of the plays and let the computer run them. Other options and features include a cheering crowd, tackled players that grunt and groan, an announcer who speaks a few bits of dialogue, four different quarter lengths, penalties turned on or off, a pre-game report, fair catches, five different running techniques, touchbacks, audibles, playoffs (including the Super Bowl), instant replays, time outs, more than 100 offensive plays, and more than fifty defensive plays. Battery backup lets you save pre-season or season career stats and return to any season in progress. Also released for the Genesis and Jaguar.

Notable Quotable:
"With superior titles such as *Madden '94* already filling store shelves, *Troy Aikman NFL Football* lacks the total package necessary to rival the leaders in the field." – *Game Players* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Although it lacks great graphics and noteworthy sound, *Troy Aikman NFL Football* does contain outstanding options and superb gameplay. It's just about everything you'd expect from one of the NFL's biggest superstars." – *GamePro* (September 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"*Aikman NFL* plays a solid game, and the NFL license allows real team names and uniform colors. While similar to *Pro QB*, new features such as the custom play designer help distinguish *Aikman* from the crowd of SNES football carts." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (November 1994)

True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links

Publisher: T&E Soft.
Developer: T&E Soft.
Game Type: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (alternating).
Year: 1992.

Released for the Genesis as *Pebble Beach Golf Links*, *True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links* features an effective behind-the-golfer perspective, supplemented by a number of small windows showing data, wind direction, player stance, swing meter, club selection (a caddy lends advice if desired), and more. Gamers are given plenty of latitude in determining how hard and in what direction to hit the ball, and battery backup saves such things as stats, scores, putts per round, longest drives, and created players (up to ten golfers in all).

There are eighteen holes of golf (on California's famed Pebble Beach), each decorated with such obstacles as bunkers, sand traps, water hazards, and trees. Other features include multiple camera angles, green grids for aiming putts, instant replays, and overhead fly-by views of the holes. Modes of play include Practice, Skins Game, Stroke Play, Match Play, and Tournament Play vs. 48 Top Golfers.

True Golf Classics is similar to *Pebble Beach Golf Links* for the 3DO and Saturn, but those versions of the game have a number of differences, including digitized golfers (on the actual course, not just the menu screens). The SNES game is playable, but it's too similar to *True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club*, which was released just six months earlier.

Notable Quotable:
"This is definitely the golf game for the professional. No cartoon characters here—just 100 percent pure golf simulation." – *N Force* (October 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Haven't I played *True Golf Classics: Pebble Beach Golf Links* before? Yes, yes I did. It was called *True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club* . . . This feels scummy to me, since this probably retailed as a full-priced game, and I don't think there's enough different and new here to justify that. I'll run down what differences I noticed. New title screen! It sure would have been embarrassing if T&E Software put the wrong name there! There's a quick start option in the main menu which puts you right in tournament play. The main menu song sounds slightly different. The key word there is 'slightly'. Different course, obviously. Different caddies, one of whom is named Dawg. Seriously. The biggest change, and I wish I were joking, is that music now plays when you are golfing!" – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club

Publisher: T&E Soft.
Developer: T&E Soft.
Game Type: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1991.

Released early in the life of the SNES, *True Golf Classics: Waialae Country Club* does not have the cachet of the various *PGA Tour* titles published by Electronic Arts, but it is certainly no slouch when it comes to hitting the links from the comfort of your living room couch. The game takes place at famed Waialae Country Club, Oahu, Hawaii, meaning there is only one eighteen-hole course. As you view the action from behind your golfer, a window up top lets you adjust your aim and stance, select the preferred club, and do a double button press on a "power scale" meter to select the strength of your swing. On the right side of the screen you can see the wind direction and speed indicator, the lie indicator, the overhead view hole layout, and the hole yardage and par.

Modes of play include Tournament, Stroke, Match, and Practice. Other features include selectable caddies, forty-eight golfers (you can save stats for ten), selectable stroke speed, fly-by view on or off, caddie advice on or off, shot path on or off (when on the ball leaves behind a trail), and hide ball on or off (when off you can see your ball even when it is hidden). Released as *Waialae no Kiseki* in Japan. The 3DO version, *Waialae Country Club* (1994), and the Nintendo 64 version, *Waialae Country Club True Golf Classics* (1998), add voice effects and two new modes of play: Waialae Open and Skins.

Notable Quotable:

"The game lacks any outstanding features and doesn't utilize any of the advanced hardware features of the Super NES. For the diehard golf fan only." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The golfing mechanics are similar to *HAL's Hole in One Golf* (and every other golf game), but more complicated . . . visually impressive courses, with a behind-the-ball view that lets you see trees and mountains in the background. The game really manages to create depth with very rudimentary technology, and it looks nice. There are even crisp-sounding bird chirps to attempt some level of immersion. But these nice environments come at a great cost; the game is terrifyingly sluggish. It takes well over a full second for the screen to adjust to turning left or right, making it impossible to eyeball shots. I would gladly take worse graphics to have more responsive controls." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

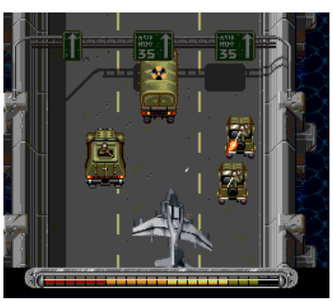
True Lies

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

One of the better movie-based titles of the era, *True Lies* puts players in the Arnold Schwarzenegger role of Harry Tasker. The action follows the film to a surprisingly high degree as Harry makes his way through a variety of labyrinthine levels: The Chateau, The Slopes (featuring snowboarding enemies), The Mall, The Park, Subway, Dock, China: The Forbidden City, The Refinery, Overseas Highway: Florida Keys, and Office Party, where the evil Aziz (played by Art Malik in the movie) holds Harry's daughter captive.

Fittingly enough, Tasker has a specific task in each area (in addition to finding his way out), such as destroy all the weapons crates, attach a modem to a computer, or find the keys to disarm a nuclear warhead. The action is viewed from a top-down perspective, with Harry dodging steam, mines, and other obstacles while using a hand gun, a shot gun, an uzi, grenades, a flamethrower, and other weapons to kill terrorists belonging to the Crimson Jihad. In addition to standard movement, Harry can do a diving shoulder roll that lets him come up out of the roll into a kneeling stance with guns blazing. He can also lock fire so he can shoot in a direction other than the one he is moving in (a technique pioneered by the 1982 arcade game, *Robotron: 2084*). One level deviates from the formula by putting Tasker in a Harrier jet, shooting trucks and other vehicles.

Fans of *Soldiers of Fortune* and *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* should enjoy this game, which includes digitized scenes from the film, tips from the Tom Arnold character Albert "Gib" Gibson, and passwords for saving progress. The *True Lies* film, which was directed by James Cameron and also starred Jamie Lee Curtis, was also adapted for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis.



Notable Quotable:
"Because the action gets frantic but never unbearable, the game works for both novice and intermediate gamers. Maybe this game is so appealing because there aren't many good overhead-view action/adventure games of this type anymore." – *GamePro* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"I found the movie quite entertaining and the game to be as enjoyable. *True Lies* offers plenty of action that most shooter fans will appreciate, but after a while the simple concept of the game can wear away at your patience. There are, however, some secret areas that you can find to stock up on more powerful weaponry." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"Instead of a fluid, *Earthworm Jim* or *Contra* shooting style, there's this twitchy, jerky, bullet-goes-wherever-it-feels-like kind of reaction. In a world filled with video games out the yin-yang, this is not something you'll want to play for very long, that's for sure. Frustratingly difficult control ends up sending *True Lies* spiraling into the video game gutter. I'm not lying." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (April 1995)

Insider Insight:
Yes, this is a "movie game," but it is a pretty good movie game! In the early '90s, the name "Schwarzenegger" was synonymous with action. The guy was legendary even then, with tons of classic action flicks to his name. If anything, he was enjoying an even broader appeal, thanks to his push into more comedic roles.

Unlike most of his films from the '80s, and even though it was also rated R, *True Lies* was a more light-hearted effort. There wasn't really much in the way of gratuitous violence, and it had more comedy than Arnie's action films usually showcased.

Video games based on his movies, though, were decidedly more "miss" than "hit." So when *True Lies* landed on the Super Nintendo as a top-down action title, I needed to play it. And unlike with most movie-inspired games of the day, I played the heck out of it.

While the graphics were not all that great and the sound was nothing to write home about, *True Lies* had buckets of one thing—fun. Solid controls, multiple weapons to pick from, and the simple joy of running through the well-laid-out levels while blasting baddies was more than enough to keep me interested.

Of course, I was the only one interested. None of my friends cared enough to even give the campaign a shot, and there was no multiplayer. Not that it stopped me from firing it up over and over again once my buddies went home. – Jason Micciche

Tuff E Nuff

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Jaleco.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

One of many *Street Fighter II* clones of the era, *Tuff E Nuff* is highly derivative, but good enough for the casual fighting fan. There are only four fighters to control, including a pair of Ryu and Ken wannabes named Syoh and Zazi. However, the characters are large and fun to watch (replay is available), the controls are smooth, the graphics are nicely detailed (check out how the evil Dolf enters the battle arena), and the backgrounds and music are impressive.

The other two playable fighters in the game include Kotono, who battles using knives, fireballs, and athletic agility; and Vortz, a professional wrestler who fights like Zangief from *Street Fighter II*. Each character has a range of punches, kicks, and throws, along with three special moves, such as Syoh's thunder spark, rising bolt, and lightning cross.

Computer-controlled opponents include: Beans, a punk and street fighting champ from the Bronx; Dolf, an assassin and mercenary who battles using a knife and a rocket launcher; Rei Mizuno, a kenpō expert and magician who summons spirits; Gajet, an Australian wrestler; Shirou, an agile ninja who uses sword and magic attacks; K's, a cyborg with bionic arms; and Jadoh, the final boss.

The best thing about *Tuff E Nuff*—featuring three difficulty levels, ten stages, a story mode, and a ninety-second time limit that can be turned on or off—is the fact that the characters' abilities are upgraded as they progress through the matches. Known in Japan as *Dead Dance*.

Notable Quotable:

"The only serious contender for *Street Fighter II*'s title belt on the Super NES at present. Its only fault is that the excitement is too short-lived for solo gamesplayers." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are solid. Characters are detailed and have enough animation frames to make their movements look fluid. It's just the characters seem to be knockoffs, and that detracts from my enjoyment of the sprite graphics . . . The tunes are the highlight . . . There are a few pieces in this game I could listen to over and over again . . . sound effects are only okay. Sometimes the fighter's voices sound muffled . . . Besides the instant replay feature, there's nothing original about this game. Everything has been done before and done better. The game is playable and has a certain degree of fun, but it doesn't come close to taking *Street Fighter*'s crown. Next challenger, please!" – SNES HUB (playing-withsuperpower.com)

Insider Insight:

There was a time when *Street Fighter II* was just about the biggest thing in my life, so when I felt I had mastered it (I most certainly didn't, but I was young) I started looking into other fighting games. One week my local rental shop got a game with such a ridiculous name that I had no choice but to pick it up. Emblazoned across the front of the box were the words "HEY PUNK! ARE YOU TUFF E NUFF?"

I can't say I have ever had a video game box so boldly ask me a question before, so rent it I did. I have a love for absurdly bad games, and I honestly did not know if this was going to be great or terrible. I believe there are folks out there who think this game is the former, but I sit squarely in the camp of it being the latter. Maybe it is the fighters repeatedly yelling "DOODOOHA!" or the incredibly unimaginative characters, or the unnecessarily in-depth story, or the instant replay mode that lets you capture the magic of every awkward frame of animation. Or maybe I just wasn't "Tuff E Nuff." – Kris Randazzo

Turn and Burn: No-Fly Zone

Publisher: Absolute Entertainment.
Developer: Absolute Entertainment.
Game Type: Flight Combat Simulator, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Part flight simulator, part air combat shooter, *Turn and Burn: No-Fly Zone* puts players in the cockpit of an F-14 Tomcat that can climb, dive, bank, and thrust. A powerful fighter, it is armed with an M61A1 Vulcan 20 mm cannon, AIM-7 Sparrow radar guided air-to-air missiles, AIM-9 Sidewinder infrared air-to-air missiles, and AIM-54 Phoenix lock and shoot air-to-air missiles.

The action involves flying over the Mediterranean, using computer and radar systems and your formidable arsenal to track down and destroy Iraqi missiles, fighters, subs, and other enemies. Landing on an aircraft carrier (including nighttime landings) replenishes fuel and ammo, and a second player can join in to operate the weapons and the computer. The backward and forward viewpoints from inside the cockpit help give the game a high degree of authenticity, as do Mode 7 graphics and full motion video replays (courtesy of a nose-mounted camera). Challenging shooting action and a unique two-player simultaneous mode make the game engaging and fun. Despite tricky controls and mediocre sound effects, *Turn and Burn* is easily worth picking up.

The sequel to *Turn and Burn: The F-14 Dogfight Simulator* for the Game Boy, *Turn and Burn: No-Fly Zone* was followed by *F-14 Tomcat* for the Game Boy Advance.

Notable Quotable:

"Despite some sound and control problems, eye-popping Mode 7 graphics make *Turn and Burn* one of the most realistic, and most involving, flight sims of the year" – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"It's not as detailed as most PC flight sims, but it's still a great effort. Arcade fans should take note, however, that this is a 'real' combat game, not a blast-em-up." – *Game Players* (January 1994)

Insider Insight:
I am an '80s baby, so films like *Iron Eagle* and *Top Gun* will always be favorites. Video games based on airplanes are hit-and-miss, but *Turn and Burn: No Fly Zone* made me feel like Goose and Maverick in *Top Gun*. A nice combination of arcade fun and simulation, it was the closest thing I had ever experienced to being in a cockpit.

For my father—who had twin boys at twenty-two and flew radio-controlled airplanes recreationally and competitively—*Turn and Burn* was a dream come true. His office at work was covered in posters of F-14 Tomcats and stealth bombers. He loved aviation, and I know that if he had a wish, it would be to get in one of those planes one day. When I was a kid, he would often take my brother and I to the USS *Intrepid* and tell us stories about the huge planes that we walked past. Before long I, too, was bitten by the aviation bug and loved playing the game.

After a long day of work, my dad would fire up the SNES and find himself in the middle of a dogfight, a sparkle in his eye. I would watch him fire sparrow missiles at his enemies, taking them out one by one. He would get a kick out of taking off every time he played, usually screaming "yee-haw" as the multi-million-dollar virtual aircraft leaped into the sky. And even though the digitized visuals are a joke by today's standards, the game made my dad feel like a heck of a lot more than the head of a middle-class family doing whatever it took to get by. For that, it will always be a special game. – Patrick Hickey Jr.

The Twisted Tales of Spike McFang

Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software.
Developer: Red Company.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Dracuman, Vampra, and General Von Hesler ruled and maintained order in the three Vladamasco islands for centuries. Unfortunately, Von Hesler decided he wanted to control all of the islands, so he gathered his zombie horde and used his dark magic to attack the other leaders. Undeterred, Vampra's daughter Camilia escaped the carnage and sought help from Dracuman's son, Spike McFang.

As Spike McFang—a junior magician and vampire in training—you throw your top hat like a boomerang and spin your cape (for short-range attacks) to battle (in real time) the various zombies, feline fighters, killer cloves, blobs, head-spinning plants, Frankenstein monsters, and other enemies and obstacles you will encounter. The game is action-oriented like *The Legend of Zelda*, but it has more RPG elements, such as talking to townsfolk and gaining experience points. As Spike levels up, his attacks become more powerful.

Twisted Tales is riddled with characters based on the Dracula and vampire mythos but with purposely misspelled names, such as Camelia (as opposed to Carmilla), who occasionally assists Spike. Von Hesler's (as opposed to Van Helsing's) son Rudy will periodically tag along as well and provide help. Other help comes in the form of magic cards Spike can purchase, enabling him to fly, turn invisible, summon bats, emit flames, turn enemies into harmless animals, and more. There are nine areas to explore, including islands, castles, deserts, and an ice palace, and up to three games can be saved via battery backup.

The sequel to the TurboGrafx-16 game *Makai Prince Dorabotchan*, which was only released in Japan, *Spike McFang* for the SNES is more difficult than its Super Famicom counterpart (which was called *Ultra Demon World War! Little Dorabo*). This is because the enemies have stronger defensive capabilities, and after Spike gains a level, his health does not get replenished.

Notable Quotable:

"A huge adventure game in the same vein as *Zelda*! The twist is you can pick up partners along the way to help you in your quest. The perspective (angled-over-head) takes a while to get used to, especially the jumps." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (June 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Basically, *Spike McFang* is one of those 'non-violent SNES *Legend of Zelda* role-playing' things, with a definite Japanese bent to the graphics that's kinda cool to watch, if not to listen to (the background tunes are pure muzak hell). You need to be very young to really enjoy this game." – *FLUX* (April 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"When I first saw this game, I thought it would be an 'Action *EarthBound*,' but it was honestly much different. The outer wackiness is still there, but the insane amount of variety is gone. *Spike McFang* was made for a younger audience, but that doesn't mean you won't enjoy it. Play it if you want to waste some time or if you need to boost your confidence after getting stuck in a game and giving up on it, because it seems to be too simple to stand on its own." – RPGFan (www.rpgfan.com)

Insider Insight:

I can honestly say that if it were not for this game sitting on my local rental shop's shelves, I probably never would have given it a chance. Thank goodness I did, though, because this game rules. *Spike McFang* made its way into my SNES by way of my having already rented every other game in the store's inventory. My dad told me that if I couldn't pick anything out, I would be going home empty-handed, so I took a chance. I mean, something is better than nothing, right?

Within minutes, I was all manner of glad I picked up this little gem because it was so much fun! I played it all weekend, leveling up, learning new hat tricks, and following the surprisingly cool storyline. I rented it again and again, but each time I got the cart back home someone had erased my game, so I always had to start from the beginning. Years later, I finally found and bought my very own copy, and sat myself down to marathon the game to the finish.

Turns out the game was pretty short, and I was actually very close to beating it back in the old rental days. Still, I love going back to it from time to time. The visuals hold up remarkably well and the music is unbelievably catchy. Plus, how great is the idea of a tomato-loving vampire going out and beating up garlic? – Kris Randazzo

Ultima VI: The False Prophet

Publisher: FCI/Pony Canyon.
Developer: Origin Systems.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Called *Ultima: The False Prophet* on the box, *Ultima VI: The False Prophet* is, as the title screen suggests, the sixth game in the Ultima series (the third game in the second trilogy), which began on the Apple II in 1981. It was the first game in the franchise released for the Super Nintendo. The game takes place several years after you, the Avatar, restored Lord British to his rightful place as the monarch of Britannia. Demonic gargoyles capture you, but your friends Iolo, Shamino, and Dupre rescue you from a sacrificial altar.

Later, at Lord British's castle, you discover that the gargoyles are invading Britannia and attacking the shrines of the virtues. You must free the shrines and discover the nature of the gargoyle invasion. Ultimately, you must achieve peace and understanding between Britannia and the gargoyles, who appear to have some virtuous motives, at least from their standpoint. To travel Britannia, you walk on foot and use such vehicles as a skiff (for river travel), a boat (on the ocean), and a hot air balloon (which can take you anywhere). You can also transport to towns and shrines via moonorbs. Unlike some RPGs, the game lacks a world map, and you can travel anywhere in the open-world, interconnected environment from the beginning.

You will explore dungeons, solve puzzles, search for hidden runes, visit taverns and healers, visit inns and tailors, defend shrines from gargoyle attacks, speak with townsfolk to gain helpful information, set up camp to restore your hit points and magic points, and much more. For combat against such creatures as giant rats, giant spiders, giant ants, demons, sea serpents, wisps, and Cyclopes, you can equip such weapons as daggers, a sword, a bow, a sling, a Morningstar, armor, shields, and a helmet.

You can also cast forty-eight different types of spells (assuming you have a spell book, enough magic points, and the necessary ingredients), including harm, light, magic arrow, poison, fireball, invisibility, paralyze, great heal, explosion, and resurrect, which restores a fallen friend to life. Actions are menu-based, where you select from such commands as "use," "give," "move," "drop," "talk," "attack," and "cast." You can't win the game if your karma is too low from performing such actions as stealing and unprovoked killing. The back of the box boasts that *Ultima VI* provides "over 100 hours of playing time." Based on the 1990 computer game.

Notable Quotable:

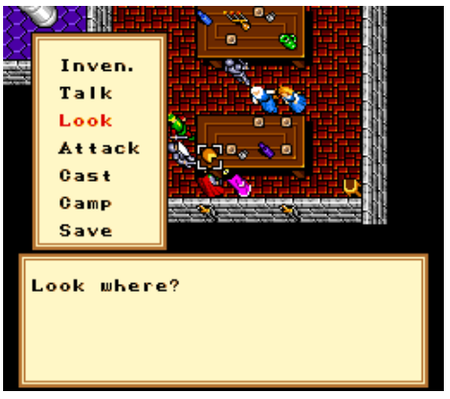
"*Ultima VI* is a satisfying RPG challenge, if you have the perseverance to plow through Britannia. However, *The Legend of Zelda* and *Final Fantasy* are far less tedious and more fun." – *GamePro* (February 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The story is good . . . The controls are simple . . . I suggest turning off the volume or keeping it low just for the sake of your sanity . . . While these graphics aren't the best looking on the SNES, they get the job done . . . This game requires a lot of time and patience." – Nintendo Classic RPG Gaming (snesrpggaming.weebly.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The most stunning thing about the game is the world in which it takes place. The size of the game is mind-blowing . . . gives you the feeling that the story is taking place in a true world, and not just a few small continents like in other role-playing games . . . Combat is done right on the same map also, which gives a good sense of scale between the characters, monsters, and surroundings. The world is detailed with good realism. As morning turns to afternoon, and evening turns to night, you can see people go about their daily routines such as waking up at a certain time, working the fields, taking a lunch break or two, and finally going to sleep . . . The one thing that will seem different to players of other role-playing games is the lack of emphasis on combat . . . there are no boss monsters, and no more than 20 or so different monsters to battle, compared to similar games where there are over a hundred." – David Borowski (formerly at allgame.com)



Ultima VII: The Black Gate

Publisher: FCI/Pony Canyon.
Developer: Origin Systems.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The sequel to *Ultima VI: The False Prophet*, *Ultima VII: The Black Gate* is called *Ultima: The Black Gate* on the box, but it does include the Roman numeral on the title screen. It takes place 200 years after you, the Avatar, last explored Britannia, and much has changed. This time around the people of the land are disappearing, and you must get to the bottom of this bizarre mystery, which appears to be the work of sorcery.

Unlike the original PC game from 1992, this version offers real-time combat and reduces your eight-member party to one. As the solo adventurer, you explore the fantastic world, killing monsters in dungeons, solving puzzles, eating food, finding and purchasing items, talking to citizens to get clues, and equipping armor, shields, and such weapons as a bone, club, dagger, whip, staff, bow and arrow, spear, lightning rod, hailstorm amulet, and fireball rings. You will also learn magic spells, such as healing, lifting objects, unlocking doors, walking over shallow water, levitating over walls and other obstacles, exploding through cracked walls, displaying your map, and more.

In addition to shrinking your party to one and introducing real-time combat, this port has many other differences from the computer game, including a shorter intro and ending, fewer non-playable characters, a simplified spell-casting system, sixteen spells instead of seventy-two, and more family-friendly content, such as the storyline changing from a rash of mutilation murders to a series of disappearances. *Ultima: The Savage Empire* followed on the Super Famicom in Japan, but a proposed US release was cancelled.

Notable Quotable:

"I'm not a big fan of the SNES ports of the *Ultima* games . . . In the process of chopping things down to fit in a reasonably-sized ROM cartridge, a lot of content and features were lost . . . But at the same time, those ports likely gave console fans a taste of the Ultima universe that they would not have had otherwise." – Vintage Computing and Gaming (www.vintagecomputing.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The game plays almost like *Secret of Mana* or *Seiken Densetsu 3*, except with a very different layout. Like *SOM* and *SD3*, it's a real-time RPG, with sword-swinging and mace-flailing everywhere. But instead of simply going up to a chest and pressing A, this has a cursor system (like *Shadowrun*'s), which is very easy to use, and you can do a lot with one cursor . . . This SNES version got stripped to the bare-bone necessities. They could have done a much better job on this game . . . I, for one, am disappointed. If you want the REAL *Ultima VII* experience, play the version for PC." – Nintendo Classic RPG Gaming (snesrpggaming.weebly.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This game has a really detailed plot and great game control, which makes it lots o' fun . . . integrates arcade-style action with the traditional elements of RPGs—puzzles, mysteries, conversation, and lots of exploration. You can interact with almost everything you encounter. The user-friendly RPG interface, ¾-overhead perspective, and effortless controls make it a breeze to get right into the game, and the Fast Magic, which creates instant access to selected spells, is a real adventurer's friend . . . graphics are solid if unspectacular. At first glance, the severe perspective appears to set the visuals at a wicked slant, but everything's easily discernible, and you get used to it. The large, nicely detailed character sprites are accompanied by diverse terrain, such as mountains, forests, caves, and castles. The sounds are ho-hum. The music's okay, capturing the mysterious mood, but it gets tedious after a while. The sparse sound effects never soar beyond average bumps, slashes, and flashes. Despite some annoying quirks (monsters keep coming back, and the game doesn't allow saves in dungeons), *Ultima VII* is nicely crafted fun." – *GamePro* (April 1995)

Ultima: Runes of Virtue II

Publisher: FCI.
Developer: Origin Systems.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The sequel to *Ultima: Runes of Virtue* for the Game Boy, *Ultima: Runes of Virtue II* plays more like *The Legend of Zelda* than a traditional RPG. You guide one of four characters for your journey through Britannia (where you must rescue the kidnapped mayors): Shamino, a ranger who begins with an axe; Iolo, a bard carrying a long bow; Mariah, a mage equipped with a wand of fireballs and a potion that restores magical energy; and Dupré, a soldier who wears leather armor and carries a long sword. Each character is rated according to strength, intelligence, and dexterity.

As you work your way through the game, talking to people, solving puzzles, boarding and conquering pirate ships, and visiting castles, dungeons, and islands, you can add the following weapons to your inventory: sword, whip, axe, long bow, crossbow, boomerang, shuriken, flask of oil (creates an explosion), wand of fireballs, lightning amulet (shoots lightning), and magic sword. You can also acquire such useful items as armor, shields, hearts (for restoring health), keys (for opening doors), hammers (for smashing barrels), cheese (which lures monsters to it), dragon scale boots (for protection against lava), and coins and gems (for purchasing items). Enemies to battle include bats, rats, snakes, slimes, trolls, ghosts, wizards, seahorses, squids, and the like.

Magic also plays an important role in the game. Magic rope lets you cross water, while magic boots enable you to walk through walls. Magic panpipes temporarily freeze monsters, while magic tops let you move faster. If you play a friendly horn, all the monsters around you turn friendly. A star wand creates and destroys force fields, a troll ring summons a friendly troll to help you, a snake staff calls on friendly snakes, and a crystal ball helps you spot monsters and important locations. If you want help from friendly Cyclopes, use your Cyclops eye. To open chests, flip levers, push moveable items, and the like, simply bump into them. There are 180 levels to explore and nearly 100 different sound effects. Also released for the Game Boy.

Notable Quotable:

"Even though I found it endlessly confusing and frustrating as a kid, it was the closest thing to an early open-world RPG that I had ever experienced. Unlike games like *Link to the Past*, *Runes of Virtue* offered a choice of playable characters and gameplay options that captured my imagination and bestowed upon me a thirst for sweeping, immersive RPGs that persists to this day. It may lack the quality and proper RPG mechanics of the mainline *Ultima* games, but for me it was a vital entry point to the wider world of RPGs, and for that I will always be grateful to *Runes of Virtue II*." – Justin's SNES (www.snescollection.com)

Notable Quotable:

"You may not always have to fight (or fight as much). Sometimes it's more efficient just to move on. For instance, the goblins retreat the first time you hit them. The blobs simply multiply . . . If you can't progress into a dungeon beyond a certain point, you've probably overlooked a room or three along the way. Look for the smallest irregularities in the walls . . . The detail here is consistently delightful—not simply the glowing colors used on the town walls or trees in the countryside, but also the rich animations of cascading fountains, waving flags, and firing cannons. It also plays a pretty mean tune . . . The puzzles are modest in scope and less ornate [than other *Ultima* games], but no less clever . . . An experienced adventurer will undoubtedly find *Runes of Virtue II* rather too basic to enjoy as full-fledged *Ultima*, but will probably still be charmed by the graphics and straightforwardness of its quests . . . the perfect starter for a beginner." – *GamePro* (August 1994)

Ultimate Fighter

Publisher: Culture Brain.
Developer: Culture Brain.
Game Type: Fighting/Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–8 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Dragged down by sluggish controls, poor animation, repetitious sounds, and flat backgrounds, *Ultimate Fighter* is the ultimate disaster (though the fighters themselves are big and look good). There are four modes of play: Story, which is side-scrolling combat; VS Tournament, which lets up to eight players compete in one-on-one, *Street Fighter II*-style fights against one another or the computer; Battle, in which the player selects a boss character to fight; and Animation, which is similar to Story, but with computer-controlled boss battles or *Final Fantasy*-style, turn-based boss battles (attack, dodge, use magic).

There are twelve fighters from which to choose, each with a different fighting technique, such as kung fu, boxing, karate, kickboxing, or wrestling. There is also weapons-based combat. Options include turbo mode speed, cosmic saucer on or off (knocking the opponent out of the ring), round time limit (1, 3, or 5 minutes, or no time limit), and how much handicap to put on a fighter. In expert mode (as opposed to standard fighting) targeting circles appear on you and your opponent. Players should attack their opponent's targets and defend against attacks on their own targets. *Ultimate Fighter* is an offshoot of Culture Brain's *Flying Warriors* for the NES.

Notable Quotable:
"It's basically a *Street Fighter* knockoff but without things like combos or cool characters or quality." – RadNat (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:
"*Ultimate Fighter* is based specifically on the SNES fighter/brawler *Hiryu no Ken S: Hyper Version*, which in turn is an updated re-release of *Hiryu no Ken S: Golden Fighter*. Culture Brain localized this updated version as well as including various updates such as the option to speed up the game and additional modes. Some sources incorrectly attribute *Ultimate Fighter* as being based on the original *Hiryu no Ken S: Golden Fighter*, but the U.S. game contains the same additional modes and has the same two-letter product code as *Hyper Version*." – Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3

Publisher: Williams Entertainment.
Developer: Avalanche Software.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–8 players (2- and 4-player simultaneous).
Year: 1996.

Based on Williams' 1995 arcade game—an update of *Mortal Kombat 3*—*Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* features twenty-three immediately playable fighters (illustrated with motion-capture graphics), including Cyrax, Jax, Liu Kang, Reptile, Scorpion, Sonya, and Sub-Zero (with and without his mask). There are also unlockable characters, including bosses Motaro and Shao Kahn. Gamers can challenge the computer or a friend to one-on-one action, engage in a little two-on-two fighting, or enter an eight-fighter tournament.

Each character has such basic moves as walk, jump, block, run, flip, and high and low kick and punch. In addition, they can do a variety of crouching moves (including uppercut), two spinning moves (foot sweep and roundhouse kick), and two aerial moves (flying punch and flying kicks). And each character has several unique special moves achieved by pressing various button combinations, such as Sektor's homing missiles and teleport punches and Shang Tsung's fireballs and hellfire.

Unlike the watered-down version of the original *Mortal Kombat* for the SNES, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* keeps the blood and gore intact, resulting in a Mature 17+ ESRB rating. You can turn the blood and fatalities (violent finishing moves) off if you would like. Other options include music (mono, stereo, or off), sound effects (on or off), and handicapping (in two-player mode). There are five difficulty levels.

Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3 was also released for the Genesis, Saturn, and Xbox 360. The Game Boy Advance version is called *Mortal Kombat Advance*, while the Nintendo DS rendition is called *Ultimate Mortal Kombat*. The latter title features a wireless one-on-one multiplayer mode and the *Puzzle Kombat* mini-game from *Mortal Kombat: Deception*. Followed by *Mortal Kombat 4* (arcade, GBC, N64, PSX), *Mortal Kombat vs. DC Universe* (Xbox 360, PS3), and various other sequels and off-shoots.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are exactly like *MK3*, and except for a few new backgrounds, most gamers would be hard-pressed to tell the difference . . . *Ultimate MK3* plays well enough, but feels less like a legitimate sequel and more like an apology for the previous game . . . the roster is heavily watered down with color-palette swaps . . . Few gamers will cry over Sheeva's absence, but where the hell is Raiden?" – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis versions sacrificed mercy and animalities for a new type of finishing move: brutalities. Brutalities are long, complex combo strings that, when performed successfully, end with the victim exploding into a shower of blood and body parts. Brutalities require the player

to enter the first 10 button presses in the combo, and the game takes over from there, depicting the character beating the other character faster and faster until they explode." – Giant Bomb (www.giantbomb.com)

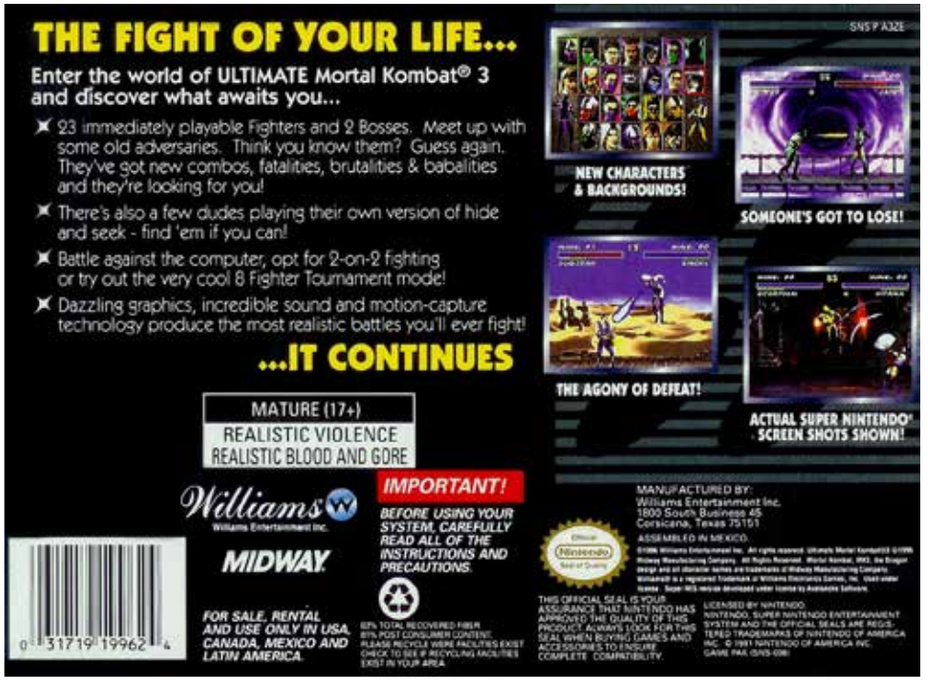
Notable Quotable:

"*UMK3* is the best *MK* game to hit the Super NES. So why the less-than-perfect score? Well, if you bought *MK3* a year ago, you might not be too crazy about plunking down more cash for this slightly enhanced version. It gives you four of the ninja characters (Jade, Reptile, Scorpion, and Kitana) that weren't available in *MK3*, plus four openly playable fighters that were secret combatants before. You also get all the combos (some were left out of *MK3*), as well as the new, yet cheap, auto combos. *UMK3*'s graphics are sharp, with slightly larger fighters than in *MK3*. The only thing missing from the arcade is the four-armed Sheeva." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (December 1996)

Insider Insight:

The *Mortal Kombat* series was the focus of controversy during the heyday of the Super Nintendo. With the original game, Nintendo took the high ground and removed the blood entirely from their game, leading many fans of the series to shift their focus to the Sega Genesis. Moving on to parts two and three, Nintendo kept in the blood, and this made the SNES versions the optimal console ports of the era. During this time I would rent video games from the local grocery store, and whenever *Mortal Kombat II* or *Mortal Kombat 3* was in stock—which was not often—I would nab them for my weekend adventures. One fateful day, I walked into the rental section of the store and of course both were out of stock. I went up to the counter to see if they had been returned and were just not out on the floor yet, which they had not. However, they did have a brand new game that just came in—*Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3*!

I was blown away, as I did not know that it was coming out at the time, and the fact that it essentially unlocked so many fan-favorite characters made this the best game released in the series to date! That weekend I was at my buddy Chip's house, and we played through the game with every character, also performing as many finishing moves as we could. It is amazing that in the day before the ease of the internet we were able to figure out a lot of the finishing moves. It would not be until much later that we would see how to do all the babalities, as those required precise circumstances to be pulled off. To this day, *Ultimate Mortal Kombat 3* is one of my favorites in the series, simply due to the fact that I have that insane nostalgic view of feeling like the first person in the world to experience the game. – Jeffrey Wittenhagen



Ultraman: Towards the Future

Publisher: Bandai.
Developer: Bec.
Game Type: Fighting, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

Ultraman: Towards the Future is a one-on-one fighting game based on the 1990 Japanese Australian TV show of the same name. You control the giant Ultraman—who is part human and part super being—as he punches (including uppercuts), kicks (including reverse kicks and jump kicks), grapples, and uses weapons (plasma, magnum shooter, arrow beam, and knuckle shooter) against nine huge monsters: Gudis, Bogan, Degola, Barrangas, Gudis II, Zeboken, Majaba, Kodalar, and Kilazee. These creatures are destroying the planet, and Ultraman must prevent this from happening.

Unlike most fighting games this one lacks a two-player mode, which is regrettable. Another difference is the fighting system. To defeat an opponent, you must not only deplete its life bar (which continually recharges), but when that life bar is depleted, hit the creature with Ultraman's most powerful special attack: the Specium Beam. If you do not use this attack, the enemy will simply regenerate its health. As the game progresses opponents learn to avoid this attack, so you must anticipate their ability to dodge it. You begin the game with three lives, battles last three minutes, and there are no continues.

Fun Fact: The *Ultraman: Towards the Future* TV show, known as *Ultraman Great* in Japan, was the tenth series in the popular Ultraman franchise, which began in 1966.

Notable Quotable:

"*Ultraman*'s simple fun, but it isn't simple-minded. All the Ultra moves look cool, and you must learn to use them all to beat the beasts. In expert mode the cart will eat your lunch. Players who dig Japanese latex monsters will freak over the sharp graphics. The sounds are just right, from the heroic Ultraman music to the monstrous screams. Ultraman is ultra-cool." – *GamePro* (November 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"The monster sprites are nicely animated, and are very accurate to the original characters—the dinosaurs even look like they're men in rubber suits! The sound effects are good, too, but the tunes are really corny . . . Ultraman's only real weakness is that the gameplay is rather limited and not at all fancy. Once you've fought your way past Z-Ton, there's no real compulsion to play it again." – *Computer and Video Games* (June 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"For those not up-to-date on their superhero merchandisers, Ultraman is the chrome-domed crusader featured in a syndicated TV show and countless product tie-ins. In this game he's pitted against second- and third-string, non-marquee-value Tokyo bashers (Degola, Gudis, a giant mosquito named Majaba) in three-minute rounds. Talk about being faithful to the original—the action here is so stiff you half expect those three silhouettes from *Mystery Science Theater 3000* to pop up in the corner of the screen and start making snide comments." – *Entertainment Weekly* (June 1992)

U.N. Squadron

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1991.

Although the box has the look of a flight simulator, *U.N. Squadron* is actually a *Gradius*-style side-scrolling shooter, with you taking to the skies as one of three different pilots: Shin Kazama, who raises his power level the quickest; Mickey Scymon, who is capable of handling the most special weapons; and Greg Gates, who recovers from battle damage the quickest.

You begin the game at the helm of a basic F8 Crusader that can hit air and ground targets effectively. Completing missions earns you cash to purchase higher-quality aircraft: F20 Tiger Shark (upgraded version of F8 Crusader); F14D Tomcat (fast and agile, made primarily for air-to-air combat); A10A Thunderbolt (features twin Vulcan cannons and a good selection of ground-based weapons); YF23 Stealth Ray (undetectable to homing missiles, uses the vertical missile launcher); and the F200 Efreet, which is capable of handling all known weapon systems. These include cluster, falcon missile, phoenix missile, super shell, bullup (fires five missile shots in different directions), thunder laser (fires three forward lasers), bombs, napalm, gunpod (fires a Vulcan cannon up and to the right), sailing missile (fires a missile straight up), and mega crush (a high-altitude missile that rains down lasers).

You will pilot your fighter over water, deserts, forests, and military installations, and through cloudy skies and underground areas, firing at planes, tanks, gun emplacements, helicopters, advanced aircraft, and other enemies. You must also avoid enemy fire, missiles, and other obstacles. Special items let you refill your fuel tank, destroy all enemies on screen, surround your aircraft with a shield, refill your special weapon, and increase your Vulcan cannon level.

U.N. Squadron is similar to the highly enjoyable 1989 Capcom arcade game of the same name, but does include a number of differences. The SNES rendition has six controllable planes (as opposed to three), alterations to certain bosses and levels, and some different weaponry. Shields are no longer for sale (they must be found within the levels) and there is slowdown, but the port adds sub-stages in which players destroy supply trucks. Fans of *Thunder Force II* and *Gaiares* for the Genesis should enjoy this game. Known as *Area 88* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"I thought that *Super R-Type* was good—but this is even better! Featuring knockout graphics, stunning sound, superlative gameplay, and a tough, tough challenge, *U.N. Squadron* is one of the best blasters available on any system." – *Mean Machines* (September 1991)

Notable Quotable:

"*U.N. Squadron* is the kind of game cynical journalists had in mind when they derided the gulf conflict as the 'Nintendo war.' Set in the desert kingdom of 'Aslan,' it has players flying punitive strikes against air, sea, and ground military targets. The combat scenes are dizzying, the explosions crisp, and the sound effects awesome. In short, *U.N. Squadron* is a Pentagon planner's fantasy: a high-tech, low-casualty aerial assault that's over as soon as you turn off your TV set." – *Entertainment Weekly* (September 1991)

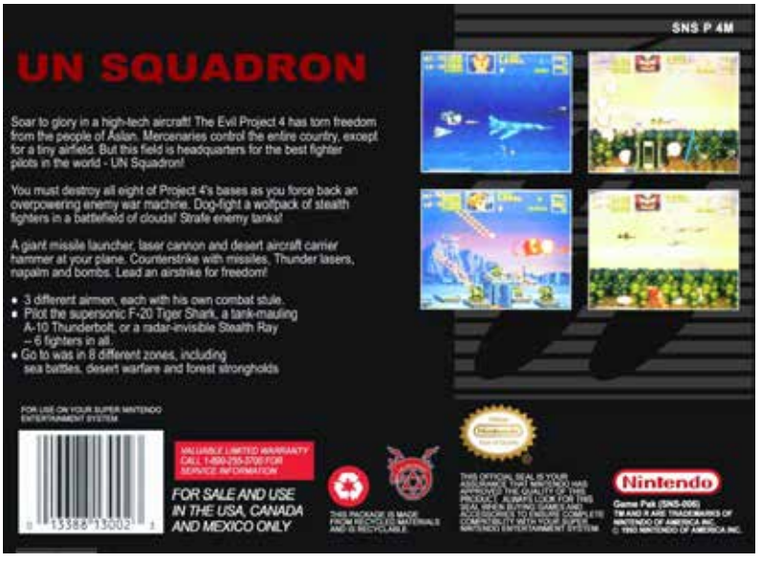
U.N. Squadron

Insider Insight:
It was summer 1993. I am at Staples with some friends. The SNES was accessible in the back of the store, without any protection, so it was possible to change carts. In the nearby rack sat the few SNES games available at the time, and the cover art for *U.N. Squadron* attracted my attention—who doesn't love a good combat flight sim game? I quickly removed the game's shrink wrap to try it out. This was a great alternative to actually buying the game, which cost CAN $90 at the time!

Of course the game was nothing like the cover art, as it turned out to be a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up. Nevertheless, my buddies and I were impressed with the game's graphics and sound effects, and we played for forty-five minutes without any interference from a salesperson. When it was time to go, I left the box and the shrink wrap near the console. Who knows if Staples paid for that opened copy?! – Eric St-Cyr

Insider Insight:
Prior to playing *U.N. Squadron*, my experience with side-scrolling shooters was primarily *Stinger* for NES, with a little *R-Type*, *Gradius*, and *Silver Surfer* thrown in for good measure. So when I went to my cousin's house and they popped this cartridge in, you can imagine my mind was sufficiently blown. Not only was the electric guitar soundtrack every kind of invigorating, but the graphics were insane! Between the larger-than-life bosses, the crazy-awesome explosion effects, and the occasional destructible environments, this was some seriously next-level stuff!

Also, I can never overstate the brilliance of the way this game sidesteps the whole one-hit kill thing shooters are known for. Having a life bar that only applies if you do not get hit twice consecutively made the difficulty manageable while maintaining the tough-as-nails reputation of the genre. It is honestly as close to scrolling shooter perfection as I've ever seen. I remember playing this game so much that I actually got to the point where I considered beating it easy. That is most certainly not the case today, but you better believe I still enjoy trying. – Kris Randazzo



Uncharted Waters

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Known as *Super Daikoukai Jidai* in Japan, *Uncharted Waters* casts you in the role of a Portuguese pirate in sixteenth-century Europe, seeking fame and fortune as a pirate, merchant, or trader. You will sail the high seas selling cargo, investing in foreign ports, assigning recruits, transferring sailors and goods, requesting the king's support, gossiping with sailors to glean information, firing guns at enemy ships via turn-based battles, engaging in hand-to-hand combat, retrieving hidden treasures, and purchasing, building, and remodeling ships. You can also play poker and blackjack, and purchase such useful items as a telescope (spot ports and spy on distant fleets), a sextant (figure your latitude and longitude at sea), swords and icons (boost your battle strength), a speculum (map out your position), and amulets (protect your fleet from dangers of the deep).

You will visit famous ports of the era in such exotic locales as Lisbon, Seville, and Istanbul, braving such dangers as pirates, strong currents, typhoons, and shipwrecks. If you run low on provisions, you can go ashore in search of spring water and buy food at the aforementioned ports. Your overall goal is to work your way through nine ranks (page all the way to duke) and restore your family's good name in the wake of the death of your father and grandfather, both of whom were ship captains who passed at sea. The SNES version of *Uncharted Waters* has the expected graphical upgrades over its NES counterpart, and it has a much nicer introductory sequence. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"*Uncharted Waters* is one of those games that suffers mostly from being totally outdone by its sequel, which offers everything that it does on the same platform, but also better . . . The first game, however, is fairly solid in its own right; it takes a number of cues from *Sid Meier's Pirates*, but is not nearly the same game. Piracy is possible, but the focus here is much more on trade than combat; until you've built a fairly sizable fortune trading, combat is actually next to impossible with the low-level ships and armaments." – Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)

Notable Quotable:

"*Uncharted Waters* will not impress those expecting a beautiful-looking seafaring experience, nor satisfy one's pirate urges with intense real-time ship battles or rousing sword fights. Graphics and sound are average at best, and the sailing is pretty slow . . . The characters all have big heads and appear to be two feet tall when you're visiting ports. Ships aren't very big either, and the game lacks animation . . . I liked the character portraits appearing whenever you talk to anyone . . . The role-playing aspect is fun despite the game being straightforward from the moment you start playing. The game could use more characters to choose from instead of only one. Yet the game does have an addictive quality once you get the ball rolling. You can basically do whatever you want, so each game might feel like a new experience to some. You'll know exactly which goods to purchase and where to sell them for profit, for example, so it's not easy to do poorly at this game. Just listen to the gossip! If you're longing for an engaging role-playing experience minus the dragons and wizards, it just might awaken the sailor inside you." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Uncharted Waters: New Horizons

Publisher: Koei.
Developer: Koei.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The sequel to *Uncharted Waters*, *New Horizons* (as it is called on the box) expands upon the pirate/exploration theme by letting players portray six different characters: João Franco, the son of Duke Leon Franco (the hero of *Uncharted Waters*); Catalina Erantzo, a Spanish naval officer who turns to a life of piracy; Pietro Conti, who seeks treasure to pay off his family's debt; Ernst Von Bohr, a geographer who fulfills his dream of setting sail on the high seas; Ali Vezas, a poor orphaned child who manages to commandeer his own cargo ship; and Otto Baynes, Admiral of the British fleet.

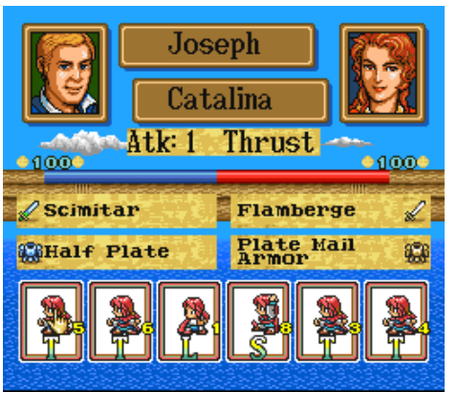
You must organize a powerful fleet with up to twenty-five different historical ships. After outfitting your fleet with a crew and provisions, you will plot your course using an overhead map. While at sea, you control the direction of the ship, whose speed is affected by wind, currents, and the number and health of your crew. You will travel to more than 130 exotic destinations, discovering and plundering more than 180 treasures, including rare animals and prized monuments. While in port you can visit a variety of places, including Inn, Castle, Item Shop, Shipyard, Tavern, Guild Hall, Church, Merchant, and Harbor. You can deposit your excess money in a bank, play some blackjack, consult a fortune teller, and take on an assortment of secret missions.

The game switches to turn-based, top-down strategy action during naval combat. According to Moby Games (www.mobygames.com), you will move ships "in order to obtain trajectories needed to fire cannons at enemy ships, or run alongside enemy vessels in order to board them. If the player's flagship attacks the flagship of the enemy fleet, they can challenge the opponent to a duel. If accepted, the game changes to a side-view of the two captains engaged in a fight. During this sequence, the player can only choose which fighting maneuver (strike, thrust, parry, lash) they wish to engage in."

Uncharted Waters: New Horizons was also produced for the Genesis. The PlayStation and Saturn versions of the game were only released in Japan.

Notable Quotable:

"*New Horizons* is a great geography lesson, tied in with a real history lesson. If you like either one of those subjects, you'll love this game. Otherwise, mateys, jump ship." – *GamePro* (October 1994)

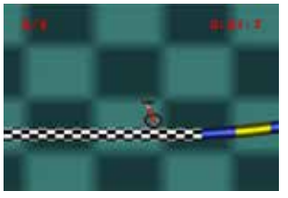


Notable Quotable:

"While the original *Uncharted Waters* laid the foundation, its sequel, *New Horizons*, picked up right where it left off and managed to add quite a few new gameplay ideas to the mix to form one of the most in-depth and unique strategy titles available for the console . . . While many of the gameplay elements in *New Horizons* have a very RPG-like feel to them, it's the strategy elements that take center stage in the game . . . Just as was the case with the original, the visuals are certainly nothing to get overly excited about. They're actually very reminiscent of the visuals found in such early Super NES RPG releases as *Final Fantasy II* and *Secret of the Stars*, but they still get the job done quite nicely. The musical score, while catchy enough early on, tends to get a bit repetitive since you'll be hearing the same basic tune until you're able to reach a different continent, at which time you'll finally be treated to a new musical track." – Corbie Dillard (www.nintendolife.com)

Uniracers

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: DMA Design.
Game Type: Unicycle Racing, 1–2 Players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



After eons of creating worlds, a great and powerful Unigod was bored, so he created an entire race of unicycles. Brought into existence after much thought, *Uniracers* was his new toy.

For you, the gamer, the result is a highly unusual, highly enjoyable racer in which you select from sixteen different unicycles for racing on more than sixty different twisting, turning, looping, rail-like, side-view courses. The tracks—including Race, Stunt, and Circuit—are multicolored, with each color giving you a clue of what to expect on the road ahead (for example, yellow means the track is about to end and there is a shortcut).

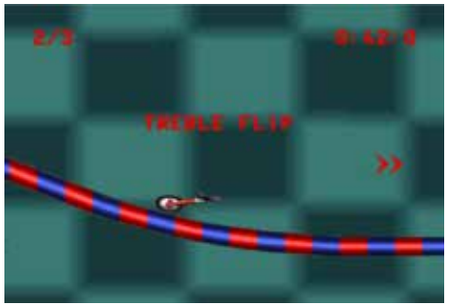
There are obstacles to jump over, such as goo, oil spills, potholes, and patches of ice. Performing twists, flips, rolls, and other stunts provides crucial speed boosts, making the game enjoyable for fans of such titles as *720°* and *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. The graphics are simplistic in design but crisp and colorful, and the game moves at blazing speeds with zero visual breakdown. Unlike most racing games, the vehicles in *Uniracers* are animated and infused with personality, with cycles doing dances after winning races and speaking phrases after performing tricks. Two-player games offer a split-screen view of the action.

Fun Fact: During the mid-1990s, an issue of *Nintendo Power* announced *Uniracers 2000* for the Nintendo 64, but that game was never developed.

Fun Fact: Silicon Graphics work stations—the same equipment employed for creating *Donkey Kong Country*—were used to bring these colorful, animated, and somehow endearing unicycles to life.

Notable Quotable:

"One summer during high school, I had a hard time concentrating on anything that wasn't related to skateboarding. When I wasn't on a board, I was thinking about it. I would see ramps and ledges in everything I looked at, imagining what could be if only a skateboard could grace those surfaces. The only other thing I did that summer was play *Uniracers* on the Super Nintendo . . . *Uniracers* was the first and only great game that brought a skateboarding mentality to a game about self-aware, racing unicycles . . . Considering that they had just one wheel and no rider, the unicycles in *Uniracers* could pull off a surprisingly large array of moves . . . a lot of what made *Uniracers* work as an action sports-type game was the level design. It was insane . . . It didn't make a whole lot of sense, but it didn't have to. It was full of white-knuckle action that was wholly unique at the time . . . *Uniracers* knew it was ridiculous and embraced it, and nowhere is this better exemplified than in the game's goofy and hilarious instruction manual, which featured an overly detailed story outline involving bored deities and a notes section that was already filled out . . . Unfortunately, part of that charm led to the downfall of the game. *Uniracers* featured impressive-looking CG unicycles that animated smoothly and convincingly. They would lean forward intensely when in the lead and look at the user with boredom when nothing exciting was happening. But they also looked a little too much like the unicycle from the animated short film *Red's Dream*. At least, that's what Pixar thought. Developer DMA Design ultimately lost a lawsuit against Pixar, and Nintendo ceased production on game cartridges. *Uniracers* sold through its initial run of 300,000 units and that was it. Because of the lawsuit, it never reached the mass audience it deserved."
– Andrew Webster (arstechnica.com)



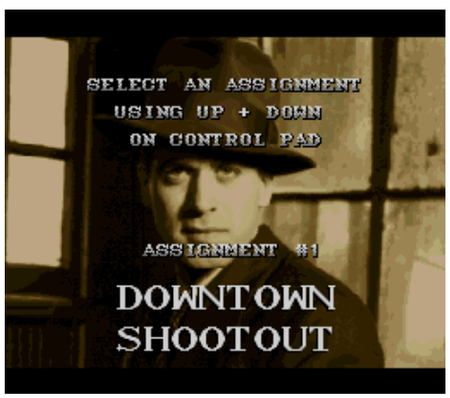
Insider Insight:
I remember loving the 16-bit action of the Sega Genesis and was completely sold on it. I used to think the NES or SNES was nice, but the Genesis was where it was at, with all the super-fast action of the Sonic games, etc. Well, one day my mind was blown when I went to a buddy's house and he said, "Hey, I have to show you this game," and it was for his SNES. Let's just say I had a very different opinion of the SNES after we played for three or four hours straight. The game was *Uniracers*, and I loved it! My love for SNES started that day and kept on going for years to come. – Tim Colson

The Untouchables

Publisher: Ocean of America.
Developer: Ocean Software.
Game Type: Multi-Genre Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

The Untouchables features five timed, multi-stage levels. Downtown Shootout is a fixed-screen, third-person shooter in which you—pictured at the bottom of the screen—fire your shotgun at mobsters who appear in windows and on the street. A platform shooter, Counterfeit Operation has you walking and jumping on crates in a warehouse, shooting mobsters while searching for counterfeit plates. The Gun Run is a side-scrolling third-person shooter that puts you on the docks and the waterfront, once again armed with a Tommy gun.

Switching perspective to top-down, The Courthouse has you climbing stairs, entering rooms, rescuing hostages, disarming a bomb, and of course shooting enemies. If you make it past these four levels, you will face Al Capone himself in first-person shooter action on the rooftops of Chicago. Depending on the level, you will hide behind barriers, aim a cursor, set off grenades, duck under enemy bullets, grab clocks for extra time, and more.



Unlike the NES game of the same name based on Brian DePalma's 1987 feature film, *The Untouchables* for the SNES is based on the 1993–94 remake of the classic television series (which ran from 1959–1963). According to the storyline, only you as Eliot Ness and the Untouchables can stop a counterfeiting, gun-running Al Capone before he and his mob take over the Windy City.

Notable Quotable:
"*The Untouchables* is a worthy license that doesn't really go anywhere as a game. While the different stages are a nice change of pace, none are long or compelling enough to justify a purchase—and that's the real crime." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Notable Quotable:
"*The Untouchables* is a great game because of its versatility. The variety of games, from platform to shooting gallery to overhead strategy, is the future of gaming. It keeps your interest in the game while adding depth to the gaming experience." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (March 1994)

Urban Strike: The Sequel to Jungle Strike

Publisher: Black Pearl Software.
Developer: Foley Hi-Tech Systems/Granite Bay Software.
Game Type: Overhead View Free-Roaming Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

The third title in the *Strike* series (after *Desert Strike* and *Jungle Strike*), *Urban Strike* has similar mission-based, isometric perspective gameplay. You fly and drive into well-defended combat zones, performing such actions as rescuing Green Berets, securing oil rigs, knocking out power grids, capturing blueprints, and destroying guards, riflemen, armored vehicles, stealth ships, bridges, bunkers, canons, helicopters, and other enemies and enemy installations. Some of the buildings you will destroy contain extra fuel, ammo, and armor, each important in helping you achieve your goals, including the ultimate defeat of media mogul H. R. Malone, who plans to overthrow the US government.

Urban Strike features three new vehicles you can commandeer: the Mohican and Blackhawk assault choppers and a Ground Assault Vehicle (GAV). Both choppers and the GAV can fire hydra rockets and a chain gun, and the Mohican can also shoot hellfire. For the first time in the series you, armed with an MX9 gun and hydra rockets, will travel on foot during certain missions. There are more than forty missions (some of which are timed) spread over ten levels: Hawaii, Baja Oil Rigs, Inside the Rig, Mexico, San Francisco, Alcatraz, New York City, Las Vegas, Malone's Casino, and Underground.

A special "Watchcom Information Console" screen—brought up by pausing the game—displays your stats. It also lets you call up the map screen, mission data log, and campaign status. Cinematic cutscenes tell the story after each level. Ported from the Electronic Arts Genesis game, *Urban Strike* was also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. Followed by *Soviet Strike* (PlayStation, Saturn) and *Nuclear Strike* (PlayStation, Nintendo 64).

Fun Fact: *Super Strike Trilogy* for the Sega CD—a compilation disc containing the Genesis versions of *Desert Strike*, *Jungle Strike*, and *Urban Strike*—was demonstrated at the 1995 Electronic Entertainment Expo, but it was never commercially released.

Notable Quotable:
"A very good action shooter. The Genesis version is probably ever-so-slightly better, but the SNES version is still a worthy purchase." – *Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:
"I was disappointed by what EA insisted be put into the third game, *Urban Strike*. They wanted the player to get out of the chopper and move around on the ground. I never did like that part of *Urban* and would have preferred pumping up the helicopter capabilities." – *Strike* series creator Mike Posehn (www.sega-16.com), discussing the original Sega Genesis version of *Urban Strike*.

Notable Quotable:
"The game itself is a well-structured balance between action and strategy with a decent learning curve and an acceptable level of atmosphere and tension. Where it is let down is in the graphics and engine departments. The fact that the 'copter flies faster in some directions than in others (diagonally down-left is fairly speedy), the glitches and stutters when you try to change direction (which are NOT due to the inertia effect), and the slowdown when you're flying over a screen full of buildings, rather than sea or grass, are all unforgivable. Add to that some occasionally sloppy collision detection and disappointingly unresponsive steering and there are enough faults to take the edge off what could be a great game." – *Super Play* (January 1996)

Utopia: The Creation of a Nation

Publisher: Jaleco.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics.
Game Type: Strategy/World-Building Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

A game that fans of *Populous* and *SimCity* should enjoy, *Utopia: The Creation of a Nation* has you, as Colony Administrator, trying to create the ideal civilizations on ten different planets in the distant future. Each planet differs according to natural resources, climate, terrain, perils, and other factors. The point-and-click action (preferably via SNES Mouse) features an isometric viewpoint of various raised topographies, and you will want to keep the populace content by providing ample housing, employment, entertainment, police protection, and the like.

As you go about your business trading with other colonies, managing such resources as fuel and food, building tanks and spaceships, developing weapons and intelligence systems, dealing with solar eclipses, using your troops to guard against alien invaders, and allocating tax funds and personnel for exploration, trade, and construction (there are thirty-four types of buildings) you have access to six different advisors who will provide data on your colony and tell you when you are doing something wrong: Civil Engineer, Head of Research, Colony Administrator, Financial Consultant, Senior Psychiatrist, and Supreme Commander.

Featuring ten increasingly difficult worlds, a Practice mode, and ten types of aliens, *Utopia: The Creation of a Nation* is a port of the 1991 computer game.

Notable Quotable:
"Too vague to be a war game, too broad to be a God game, *Utopia* falls between two stools. A game which some go ape over and everybody else wonders why." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Graphics aren't fabulous . . . A tile-based system is used . . . The buildings look pretty cool, though . . . I like some of the music tracks . . . They're all pretty catchy and appropriate for the galactic setting. The sounds will indicate that you are under attack, so keep the volume on." – The Vault (vimm.net)

Notable Quotable:
"*Utopia*'s controls are an easy-to-learn point-and-click icon system. Although the game is designed to work with the SNES Mouse, the regular controller works just fine. The controls are not as simple as those of *SimCity*, but the interface is straightforward and easy to learn. You're just a click away from accessing any of the data you need to efficiently monitor your colony. All of this cool visual data is highlighted by weird and wonderful music. The Utopian version of Pachelbel's 'Canon in D' is especially nice . . . In what's getting to be a crowded category, *Utopia* succeeds in standing out from the crowd by combining some of the best qualities of other society-building strategy games. The result is an entertaining and absorbing game. However, the complexity of the gameplay and the lack of up-tempo thumb action make it not for everyone." – *GamePro* (March 1993)

Vegas Stakes

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: HAL Laboratory.
Game Type: Gambling, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Vegas Stakes features five different types of games: Slots, Roulette, Craps, Seven-Card Stud Poker, and that most ubiquitous of all video gambling simulations, Blackjack, which lets you double down, split, and buy insurance. The cartridge does much more than just let you play games, though. It attempts to emulate the Las Vegas experience, as you can check out five different casinos and interact with other casino patrons, including beggars, helpers, and pickpockets.

You will need to register your name, and you can call on a companion who will give you advice, odds, and the rules of the games. The manual is also helpful, with odds charts and a poker hand rank chart. With the exception of poker, which is a single player game, all the games allow for up to four players. Different casinos have different denominations available, from $1 bets at the Hideaway all the way to $1,000 wagers at the luxurious Laurel Palace. You begin the game with $1,000, and your ultimate goal is to win $10 million. Battery backup lets you save up to four games.

Known as *Las Vegas Dream* in Japan, *Vegas Stakes* is the sequel to *Vegas Dream* for the NES. It is compatible with the Super NES Mouse. The Game Boy version of *Vegas Stakes* offers Super Game Boy enhancement with borders that use art from the SNES game.

Notable Quotable:

"Usually, casino games just get old quick. *Vegas Stakes*, on the other hand, is actually a decent amount of fun, because it has at least a hint of an adventure mode in the game." – *Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"*Vegas Stakes* neither turns in a loss or a significant gain—it simply is what it is, a casino sim with a fair variety of different gambling games and a bit of non-player character interaction thrown in as an aside." – Lucas M. Thomas (www.ign.com), reviewing the game on the Wii Virtual Console.

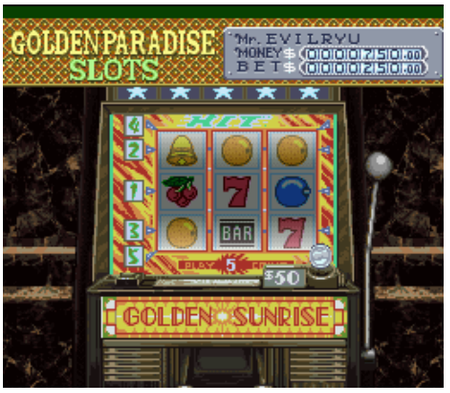
Notable Quotable:

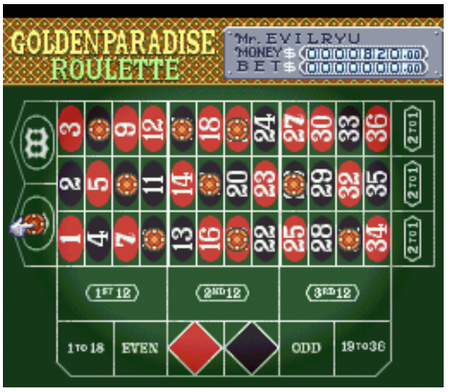
"The different games are portrayed accurately and are a lot of fun to play. The graphics are good and the backgrounds are clear and well-drawn. The sounds on the other hand are annoying . . . The game plays well, but lacks the variety that one would expect to find in a 16-bit gambling simulation. There should be a few different types of slot machines . . . There is also a lack of variety in playing poker . . . A few other games would be nice, but at least the major five are here . . . a good game for anyone who wants to give gambling a try without risking the money." – *Electronic Games* (September 1993)

Vegas Stakes

Notable Quotable:

"The two card-games are probably the best of the bunch, since they involve a tangible amount of skill even with no money at stake, but both roulette and craps are clearly little more than random number generators with a graphical interface. The solitary slot machine is even more pointless. Put your (pretend) coins in, pull the (pretend) handle, ooh, better luck next time. There's no hold, or nudge, or anything that vaguely resembles entertainment in this mindless task. *Vegas Stakes* beefs up its slender charms with a cheesily quaint story, which casts you as one of a group of friends hoping to strike it rich in the sinful city. It's a cute idea . . . but all the silly hotel room phone calls and animated intro sequences can't disguise the fact that all these characters really do is act as on-demand hint dispensers." – Dan Whitehead (www.eurogamer.net), reviewing the SNES game downloaded to the Wii Virtual Console.





Insider Insight: When the Super Nintendo came out, my older brother and I were still rocking some of the original NES games. My immediate family was not well off enough to buy us a new system—not when we already had a perfectly good one, anyway. My grandparents had disposable income to spare. My grandmother thought it would be a great idea to buy a Super NES. They lived in the house behind mine, and during summer break, when both of them were at work, I would sneak in, boot it up, and play some *Super Mario World*. Eventually, after beating it, I wanted to play more games, but it wasn't my system. My grandmother was not very good at *Mario*—she lost interest in that game quickly, so she bought another game. A cartridge that had the games that she already liked to play: *Vegas Stakes*.

I started playing *Vegas Stakes* in those summer days, learning blackjack and craps and spending far too long on the slot machines. What I loved about *Vegas Stakes* was that it was a gambling game, but there was an ending to it. You could beat a game about gambling! I would save-scum the hell out of always betting everything on black (thanks, Wesley Snipes) and reload if I lost. Or I would spend hours putting fake money into a fake slot machine and hope for a fake high roller casino to call me and invite me to gamble more. Eventually my grandmother stopped playing the SNES, mainly because I relocated the console to my bedroom. To this day she still chides me for stealing it.

When all is said and done, *Vegas Stakes* taught me two things: I have an affinity for no-stakes gambling and I should never move to Vegas. – Brandon Cruz

Venom/Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Software Creations.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

The sequel to *Maximum Carnage*, *Separation Anxiety* adds a welcome two-player mode to the beat-'em-up formula, but makes the characters smaller and takes away the cutscenes and the Green Jellÿ music. Spider-Man and Venom form an uneasy alliance to battle Venom's symbiote offspring (Scream, Phage, Riot, Lasher, and Agony), along with Carnage, Jury, and a repetitious variety of thugs. Agile Spidey can do tornado kicks, while strong Venom does a ground pound maneuver. Both can run, jump, kick, and use webbing. In Cooperative mode, players fight together and cannot harm each other.

Levels to battle through include New York City (battle numerous thugs and villains); A Bridge to Bedlam (fight Life Foundation soldiers, swing across gaps in the unfinished bridge); Into the Woods (face soldiers and discover hidden pathways); The Life Foundation (take an elevator to the bottom, encounter heavily armed members of the Jury); City Beneath the Soil (battle deadly symbiotes and laser-wielding Life Foundation troops); Plaza of Doom: The Perilous Plaza (a shopping mall patrolled by Foundation members and two members of the Jury); Ventilator Blues (encounter Chun-Droids and razor walls in tight, maze-like spaces); Internal Security Zone I (a high-tech area protected by robots and soldiers); Green House (fight soldiers and other assailants on a catwalk); Warehouse (a two-story supply house guarded by soldiers with flamethrowers); Internal Security Zone II (dodge laser bursts and other security devices); and Carnage Uncaged (the final showdown).

By collecting superhero icons throughout the levels, you can call on Captain America (who hurls his shield), Ghost Rider (who wields a chain), Hawkeye (who shoots arrows), and Daredevil (a blind vigilante street fighter) to lend a helping hand. You can also pick up health and extra lives. *Venom /Spider-Man: Separation Anxiety* was also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics have been improved a bit, with more animations and more color. The areas you fight through are more diverse and interesting than *Maximum Carnage*, but it still feels extremely repetitive. You basically have the same attacks, with the addition of some new stuff that adds a bit of excitement, but no real long-term play value." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Remember *Maximum Carnage*? There was a game that people loved or hated. Personally, I found a lot of enjoyment in that game. The sequel, however, doesn't do it for me. I don't like the graphics: plain and simple. The moves and sound are almost the same, as are the enemies, seemingly ported directly out of the original. With so little changed, you must ask yourself, 'Is it really worth it?'" – *Ultimate Gamer Magazine* (January 1996)

Insider Insight:

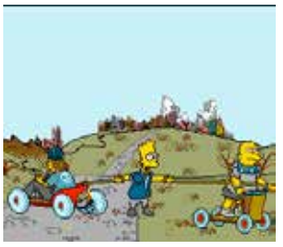
The first Spider-Man game I ever played—actually the first game based on any comic book character I played—was *The Amazing Spider-Man* for the Game Boy. However, the first Spider-Man game I fell in love with was *Maximum Carnage*. From its blood-red cart, comic panel cutscenes, and Jellÿ music, it was just about everything I could ask for in a 16-bit Spider-Man game. About the only thing it was missing was co-op, which is something that *Separation Anxiety* gave us.

Growing up I was not close to an arcade that housed Sega's *Spider-Man* arcade game, so for me *Separation Anxiety* was the first time I got to play a Spider-Man game that could be enjoyed with another person. I remember renting *Separation Anxiety* when it was new and getting through the entire game in one sitting with my brother—something I could never do in *Maximum Carnage*. A few years ago (I'm in my thirties now) I managed to find my own copy while vacationing, and I enjoyed it with a friend just as much as I did when I was a kid.

Subtracting the ability to play co-op, *Separation Anxiety* lacks a lot of the charm that made *Maximum Carnage* stand out among an ocean of beat-'em-ups on the SNES. Although it does not quite reach the heights of its predecessor, *Separation Anxiety* is by no means a bad game—even today there are very few games with "Spider-Man" in the title that let you partner up with a friend. As someone who has grown up with Spidey as their favorite superhero, that counts for an awful lot. – Blair Farrell

Virtual Bart

Publisher: Acclaim Entertainment.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Multi-Genre Action, 1 player.
Year: 1994.



Prime time cartoon character and eldest Simpsons sibling Bart Simpson is caught in Martin Prince's virtual reality machine, resulting in six mini-games of varying quality. In Dino Bart, the boy, as a dinosaur, walks left and right, jumps, ducks, enters caves, snaps his tail, growls, and deals with such enemies and obstacles as velociraptors, tarpits, lava, and radioactive waste. Doomsday Bart features a behind-the-motorcycle, *Hang-On*-like perspective, with Bart firing water balloons at enemy bikers.

Baby Bart is a platformer in which an infantile Bart swings on trees, hops from clotheslines, rides a carriage, shoots a pacifier, and more. Mount Splashmore has Bart, viewed from behind, going quickly down a water park slide, grabbing extra time while avoiding other riders and obstacles. Pork Factory Pig Bart is a platformer in which a piggish Bart bounces on his tail, jumps, uses color-coded keys, and rescues his pig friends. In Virtual Class Picture (the best game of the bunch), Bart is viewed from behind as he hides behind objects and throws eggs and tomatoes at his classmates. *Virtual Bart* was also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

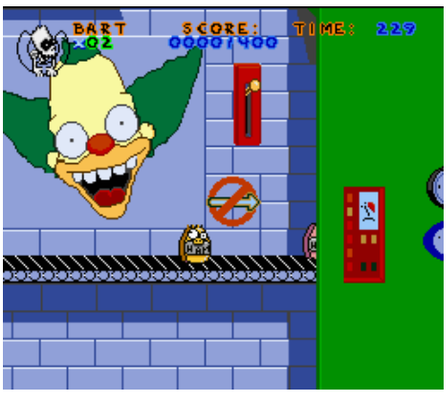
"Hey, why not an adaptation of *The Simpsons* arcade game? This one just plain misses the mark. The control is awful (like on the dinosaur stage), the stages unappealing, and the whole thing seems rushed." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"To be fair, every stage is an almost completely different game, but play control is, well, lacking (the baby and biker sections were frustrating as hell) and the stages aren't even creative—I mean this is a 16-meg cart! Where did it all go?" – *Game Players* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Simpsons fans will love identifying the show's many characters and watching Bart tackle so many challenges, none of which are too difficult. Non-fans may find the game silly, however, and too reliant on the character's charms. Admittedly, you've seen most of these styles of gameplay, but not always on one cart, and not always with such good humor." – *GamePro* (October 1994)



Insider Insight:

I love *The Simpsons*. I watched the original live broadcasts of *The Tracey Ullman Show* when upstart Fox network was struggling for viewership simply to see *The Simpsos* shorts sandwiched between the show's skits. I played Konami's excellent arcade game and hoped for the best on home consoles and handhelds. Sadly, Acclaim always seemed to drop the ball concerning the Simpsons titles . . . including *Virtual Bart*. One would think that by Acclaim's ninth try they would get it right, but it seemed that the largest game publisher at the time was more concerned with using the license as a cash cow instead of treating the series with dignity.

Still, I trudged through the game, trying to convince myself along the way that my $60 was well-spent. Obviously I'm still a bit bitter about it, as I am still grumbling about it a quarter century later. Acclaim's *Virtual Bart* left me disappointed once again, and obviously emotionally scarred for life. If only Konami had been granted the console rights to *The Simpsons*. They were firing on all pistons in the '90s, making all kinds of great game titles. Perhaps in a virtual world . . .
– Michael Thomasson

Vortex

Publisher: Electro Brain.
Developer: Argonaut Software.
Game Type: Third-Person 3D Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

In *Vortex* you control a powerful morphing battle system, and your mission is to retrieve segments of the A.I. Core spread throughout the Aki-Do System. You are then to take these Core segments to their resting place to be reassembled, therefore assuring victory over the evil Aki-Do race. Prior to entering the Aki-Do System, you should first complete a weapons test, a navigation test, and a seek-and-destroy test. After you complete these preliminary simulation battles, you will be sent to the Aki-Do System by way of the Vortex.

The morphing battle system is an impressive force. Not only is it equipped with a radar, a shield, a target cursor, and a compass, it is also loaded to the teeth with guided missiles, rockets, a cannon, a laser, and other weapons. With the mere push of a button, this massive machine can transform into a walker, a land burner, a sonic jet, or a hard shell. You will spend most of your time in this game walking or flying while blasting mechanical crabs, kamikaze alien pilots, enormous bosses, and other enemies while avoiding such obstacles as slamming doors, claw traps, closing arches, and missile turrets.

Even though you control the mighty morphing battle system, you will need some help along the way. One defense reconnaissance droid can be found on each planet. Until they run out of energy or get destroyed, these droids attack anything that gets near you. Your Mother Ship—another ally—transports you between missions, offers you advice, and monitors your progress. Like *Star Fox*, *Vortex* contains a Super FX chip, giving the game 3D polygonal graphics.

Notable Quotable:

"If you like polygon shooters and you don't mind a plodding pace, you'll like *Vortex*. However, if you want high-speed action, you'll have to zoom to a different SNES galaxy." – *GamePro* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"There's quite a range of foes throughout the seven levels . . . each mode has advantages and disadvantages, and you'll find some modes suit certain situations better than the others. The walker has weapons on both arms (two options for each) and is your best bet for picking off hordes of enemies, and is also the only mode that can pick up items such as power-ups and keys. The sonic jet and land burner are your speedy options. The jet burns more fuel and cannot stop but is faster and can handily fly over large gaps, although both the walker and land burner can jump over smaller gaps if needed. The hard shell can move slowly either forwards or backwards, has a small amount of bombs to take out multiple enemies, and subtracts damage from the fuel meter rather than the shields . . . Even on 'easy' the game provides a challenge . . . The difficulty can be frustrating, as can an extra-long collecting mission, and getting stuck to a building always annoys. There are some visual flaws, and it lacks the cinematic moments found in the previous Super FX games, but the game makes good use of the multiple modes of the morphing battle system and has some cracking music. Overall, *Vortex* is an enjoyable gaming experience." – Nintendo Life (www.nintendolife.com)

Vortex

Insider Insight:
After waiting what felt like forever since the release of *Star Fox*—which gave the world its first taste of what the Super FX chip was capable of—I was ready for more 3D gaming on the SNES, so I was excited when I stumbled across a cheap copy of *Vortex* at Lechmere one day during my lunch break at Sears. The game was in a clearance bin with at least twenty sealed copies of the legendary *EarthBound*. I could not wait to get home after my shift that day to check out what else the Super FX chip could do.

Unfortunately, *Vortex* was totally underwhelming, to put it mildly. The game starts off as a third-person space shooter similar to *Star Fox*, which was awesome, but then after a minute or so I realized that it did not capture that same magic. Plagued by minimal level design and wave after wave of unbalanced enemy attacks and needlessly complicated controls the game quickly fell apart, showing its lack of vision. It didn't help that the same week I picked up *Vortex* I had also received my Japanese PlayStation with *Ridge Racer*, a game that raised the expectations bar for *Vortex*.

You do get to control a mech in the game, which is neat, but this showcases just how limited the Super FX chip really is. The game was developed by some of the same developers at Argonaut Software who worked with Nintendo on *Star Fox*, but this one falls short in so many ways. I find it interesting that the same developers who made a triple-A title like *Star Fox* made a completely dull game without the supervision that was provided by Nintendo when the two companies worked on *Star Fox*.

For anyone looking for an okay tech demo to show off SNES 3D polygons with some of the best texture mapping I have seen on the console then *Vortex* is for you, but if you are looking for a fun 3D game, you will want to fly shotgun with Fox McCloud once again. – Russ Kumro

War 2410

Publisher: Advanced Productions.
Developer: Advanced Productions.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

In 2003, all hell broke loose when geneticists tried to create the perfect soldier. Three of the new life forms—savage orcs, cybernetic androids, and genetically enhanced humans—turned against their creators. These forces now battle for world domination.

In *War 2410*, gamers use a cursor to move mechs, planes, tanks, troops, and the like over a top-down land map, trying to destroy enemy units and, at times, trying to capture enemy bases. Units—which cannot be modified nor improved, and which are already in place when the game begins—differ in attack ranges, movement limits, and attack strengths. For example, fighters can only attack other planes, while bombers can attack any unit. Terrain, such as buildings and mountains, can give you a tactical advantage, and attacked units always counterattack, as long as the attacker is within range. In cities you can repair your units. Maps also contain deserts, minefields, plains, forests, and the like.

During battles you get a close-up view of the action. As the game progresses, both the player's army and the computer's army increase in size. The map also gets bigger. There are twenty different scenarios, each with no time limits. Winning players are awarded medals based on battle efficiency.

Notable Quotable:

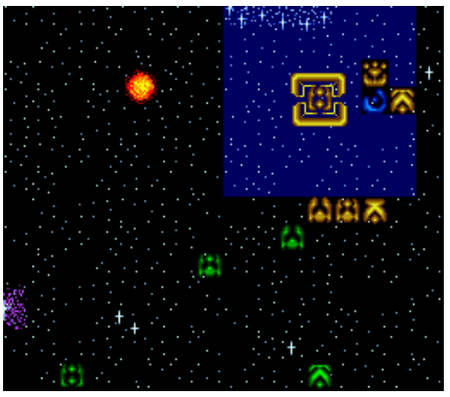
"Borrows heavily from hex-type games . . . The road to victory lies in your ability to create mismatches between units and to bring your long-range guns into play effectively . . . isn't for everyone, but if you like strategy games without having to worry about lots of details, *War 2410* may be the perfect game for you . . . Simple rules of engagement and interesting tactics . . . Simple graphics. Slow battle animations. Scenarios develop slowly." – *Nintendo Power* (January 1996)

War 3010: The Revolution

Publisher: Advanced Productions.
Developer: Advanced Productions.
Game Type: Turn-Based Strategy, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

On planet Joyec, human slaves have rebelled against their Kyllen oppressors and seized one of their battle fleets. Now you must help them overthrow Kyllen. The turn-based action of *War 3010: The Revolution*—the sequel to *War 2410*—takes place on a top-down map of space as you use a cursor to move such ships as destroyers, fighters, and marauders. Weapon power varies among ships. For example, a ship that is strong up close may not have long-range reach.

During battles, you select menu options such as attacking, movement, battlefield map, terrain or unit information, and overview of your units and enemy units. You can also scout planets for technology. When you confront another ship, the viewpoint switches to your ship's view screen, through which you see a large, detailed enemy ship. Attacked units will always counterattack (unless of course they are destroyed first). There are sixteen missions in all, with such goals as freeing a planet, or protecting a convoy from alien raiders. There are also checkers and chess mini-games.



Notable Quotable:

"Cheesy sounds and bland music stymie this game. Add in the endless menus (with no explanations to most icons, so you must read the manual), and you'll find yourself wishing the Revolution would end." – *GamePro* (January 1997)

Notable Quotable:

"The game engine is based on traditional hex-board war games and is very similar to the engine in *War 2040* . . . The graphics of the battle units are considerably more sophisticated than those in *War 2040* . . . Much of the strategy revolves around positioning your ships in areas where they gain defensive advantage. In later scenarios, new ships are introduced and the challenge picks up considerably . . . An easy-to-learn strategy game . . . not enough challenge for serious strategy fans." – *Nintendo Power* (September 1996)

Wario's Woods

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Wario and his band of monsters have invaded the Peaceful Woods and renamed the formerly tranquil place Wario's Woods. As Toad—the Mushroom Kingdom hero—you must put an end to this evil reign of terror.

Such is the backstory for this game, which is an interesting take on the "falling item" puzzle genre established by *Tetris*. Instead of directly controlling the monsters and bombs that fall from the top of the screen (though you can push down to make them go faster), you guide Toad as he works to move them into groups of three or more (diagonally, horizontally, or vertically). Friends Catherine and Sprite toss bombs from a tree, and if you match them together with other bombs or monsters of the same color, the items will be removed from the playfield (for monsters to disappear, at least one bomb must be in the row). Black Bat throws monsters and bombs onto the playfield, while Wario makes the ceiling of the playfield sink. If the screen fills up with bombs and monsters it's game over.

Toad is fairly versatile in the ways he can maneuver and manipulate objects. He can pick up the entire stack in front of him and he can pick up a single object, even if it is in the middle of a stack. He can kick monsters and bombs left and right that are in front of him, and he can escape from the bottom of a stack to the top. He can also climb up walls and stacks to catch objects or pick up certain parts of a stack.

In split-screen action versus a friend or the computer, VS Mode attacks give you the advantage. If you create a chain reaction a stack of monsters will appear on your opponent's playfield, and the ceiling in your playfield rises. If you match four or more pieces your opponent's ceiling will sink. If you make a match of five or more monsters and bombs a diamond will appear, and if you make a match with the diamond, all of the bombs on your opponent's playfield will become monsters. There is also an egg attack, which creates more monsters on your opponent's playfield when you place a single bomb or monster and two matches explode simultaneously.

Games with no opponent include Round, where you see how far you can go into Wario's Woods by clearing screens to advance to the next level; Time Race, where you try to complete five sets of screens in the quickest time possible; and Lesson, which is a practice mode. The NES version of the game, which was that console's last licensed original release in North America, lacks the VS COM mode. The SNES version also has better graphics and battery backup for saving progress.

Notable Quotable:
"What at first appears to be a simple puzzle game is given depth by its challenge and its many game modes." – *Game Players* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"The standard-looking graphics star cutesy animated characters and Super Mario-style bombs and monsters. Although the music isn't bad, it's also not memorable. *WW*'s options give it play value, but its familiar play style makes it a ho-hum puzzler." – *GamePro* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"Unlike *Tetris*, this game isn't easy to understand right off the bat and you might find yourself losing a lot at the easiest level for a while. While it's a lot different from *Tetris*, it's still kind of confusing and difficult. The graphics are cute and colorful, though, and that's cool. Beautiful eye candy is a plus." – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (March 1995)

Insider Insight:
One summer afternoon, I went to Toys "R" Us with my friend to get a new NES game. They still had those awesome little flap things with the paper tickets underneath, and I had narrowed my choices down to *Wario's Woods*, *Mega Man 6*, *Yoshi's Cookie*, and *Star Tropics II: Zoda's Revenge*. I wound up leaving with *Star Tropics II* because I adored the first one, but something about *Wario's Woods* had left an impression on me.

A few months later I went to my local rental shop, hoping to grab *Wario's Woods*, and while they did not have it on NES, they did have it on SNES; in hindsight, I definitely got my hands on the superior version. On either system it was a considerably more complicated puzzler than I had ever played, but the SNES game can best be described as sharp. The fluid animation of the monsters, the crisp explosion sounds, Wario's hideous face—it all combined brilliantly with the air-tight controls to make a game that is so distinctly 16-bit in the best way possible. The NES game is no slouch, but if I want to play *Wario's Woods*, the SNES game is the way to go. – Kris Randazzo

Warlock

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Realtime Associates.
Game Type: Platform Shooter/ Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Loosely based on the 1989 film of the same name, *Warlock* is sort of like *Castlevania*, but with the protagonist—a modern druid warrior—shooting magic blasts instead of wielding a whip. Also *Warlock* is nowhere near as good as *Castlevania*, partly because of an extra animation in which the warrior ducks when he shoots, causing a delayed reaction. The objective is to prevent the Warlock from assembling six ancient runestones, which is done by running, jumping, riding elevators, climbing stairs, and avoiding obstacles (such as deadly ooze and swinging axe blades), along with shooting bats, slime monsters, archers, gargoyles, vultures, horsemen, and other enemies.

To assist in the quest, you can collect such spells as smart bombs, healing, protection, revival, and a staff that shakes loose hidden items. In addition, you control an orb that can pick up spells from a distance and attack otherwise out-of-reach enemies. Unfortunately, the various attack methods are not as cool nor as fun to use as the ones in *Castlevania*. Levels, which exude gothic horror, include New England, The Cavern Below the Lake, A Grim Garden, Inside The Wizards Castle, The Cemetery, The Mountains, and The Underworld.

Warlock for the SNES is similar to its Genesis counterpart, but the blood has been removed (i.e., zombies explode in the Genesis version while they simply turn to fog in the sanitized SNES rendition). However, the SNES game has superior graphics.

Notable Quotable:
"At first I thought this game was too easy. The more I played it, I realized it was just too boring. Some of the characters take too long to die, or I should say, require too many hits. Get serious, you can grow old in the time it takes to kill some of these guys—next!!!" – *Game Players* (April 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"This cart is a throwback to the good old days of side-view action/adventure carts . . . slightly imprecise directional . . . You often fall into bottomless gaps or inadvertently roll into enemies because down and the jump button occasionally don't fire on cue . . . visuals need some pizzazz. Backgrounds are dark, deep, and dangerous-looking, but the character sprites appear flat and indistinct. The sounds are sinister, as organ-based music jams ominously. The audio effects are few but fierce. *Warlock* won't set your system on fire, but despite the sometimes-frustrating controls, it's a good intermediate adventure with some truly challenging puzzles." – *GamePro* (April 1995)

Insider Insight:
Trimark Entertainment had two film franchises they were considering developing: *Warlock* and *Leprechaun*; I am glad they decided to go with *Warlock*! Our SNES producer had this crazy idea to rotoscope an actor (himself) in a long, blustery coat and use that as animation reference; I have to say it worked out pretty well. – David Warhol

WarpSpeed

Publisher: Ballistic.
Developer: Accolade.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Viewed from inside the cockpit, *WarpSpeed* has players piloting one of four different star fighters: the Stinger, Striker, Stalker, or Slasher. There are seven battle scenarios, plus a Campaign mode, all of which revolve around protecting outer space bases from hostile aliens. Despite its title, the game appears to move pretty slowly as players dodge asteroids and mine fields and shoot what look like huge fireballs (two at a time—one on the left and one on the right) at alien vessels. There are eight quadrants of space to protect, each comprised of sixty-four sectors.

The ship players command is equipped with a long-range scanner that brings up an 8 × 8 overhead map grid that lets players warp to bases (for repairs and refueling) or enemy ships (to engage them in battle). In addition, a hyperwave receiver lets players communicate with space stations and with the aliens (who dare the player to duels in space). According to the game's storyline you are "the bad dude of deep space" who must destroy the Alien Horde before they burn Earth to a crisp. The Genesis version has better, more detailed graphics.

Notable Quotable:

"*WarpSpeed* seems heavily 'inspired' by *Wing Commander*—just as *Wing Commander* was inspired by classic space shooters like *Star Raiders* and *Elite*. The plot is the typical 'defend the galaxy against alien invaders,' but the gameplay is fast and furious." – *Super NES Games Secrets: Volume 3* (1993, Prima Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

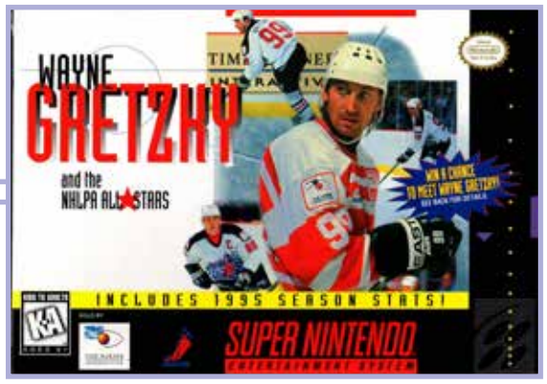
"My parents knew I loved the movie *Star Wars* a lot and saw the cool cover for this game and thought, 'Hey, Tom doesn't need *Bionic Commando*, he needs *WarpSpeed*. The joke is, *WarpSpeed* is the worst game ever made, and *Bionic Commando* is one of the best . . . Bad graphics . . . bad music . . . like some guy just pounded randomly on his keyboard in hopes for the best . . . bad story . . . bad interface . . . bad gameplay . . . all you do in this game is warp to pirates, shoot the pirates, rinse, repeat." – thefailsite (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"Fighting the enemy ships is not very exciting due to the weak use of scaling and significant amount of slowdown . . . While the view of space looks fine, everything changes once you start engaging the enemy. You'll see the ship far off in the distance one moment, and then it will appear right in front of your nose a moment later! You'll then have the pleasure of experiencing slowdown as you come seemingly within an inch of the vessel. Why would the enemy zoom right in front of your ship anyway? After a few moments . . . poof! It's gone. Then the cycle repeats until you either emerge victorious or suffer a loss . . . For the next release, the developers need to improve the space combat, ship scaling, and enemy AI, plus throw in a battery to keep track of scores, rankings, and medals earned by your pilot." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars

Publisher: Time Warner Interactive.
Developer: Semilogic Entertainment.
Game Type: Sports/Hockey, 1–4 players.
Year: 1995.



Endorsed by "The Great One," *Wayne Gretzky and the NHLPA All-Stars* offers four standard modes of play: Exhibition, Practice, Tournament, and Season. In addition, there is a Just Play option that takes impatient gamers straight to the action (the computer automatically picks the teams). Players from thirty-two NHL teams/cities are represented, including such stars as Mario Lemieux, Eric Lindros, and Mark Messier, but the lack of an NHL license means that official team names and logos are absent. There are also international teams: Team USA, Team Canada, Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Czechoslovakia.

Players are rated according to speed, shooting accuracy, toughness, and offensive and defensive awareness, and their stats are based on the 1993/94 NHL season. The thirty-degree side-view (horizontally scrolling) perspective depicts large, nice-looking skaters. Other features and options include battery backup; player trades; three play styles (defensive, aggressive, and roughest); three-on-three capabilities; arcade- and simulation-style play (the latter featuring more penalties called); adjustable team names and colors; video clips of penalties and goals; and lots of jolly good fighting. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

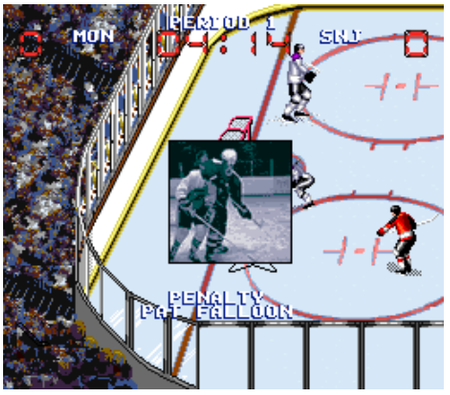
"This game never got on the ice for me. For one thing, the unrealistic player animations such as checks and skating ability weren't pleasing to see. Plus, controlling players took a bit to get used to. Scoring against the CPU is challenging, giving the game more replay value, but it takes more than this for a sure keeper." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"I was not a fan of the Genesis version, and my opinion remains basically unchanged about the SNES game. Don't get me wrong, I love the concept of reviving the *Blades of Steel* perspective, but the gameplay just ain't right. Faking out the goalie seems almost impossible in this game, and scoring in general seems like an act of randomness, not skill." – *GameFan Magazine* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"[In 1994] several of us at Time Warner thought about creating a new hockey title. We were fans of EA Sports' NHL games, but we thought we could make something better. So for a long time we just played all the available hockey games, coming up with ideas and thinking about who would work on such a project. After looking at lots of programmers and artists, I settled on a company called Semilogic Entertainment, which I'd worked with in the past. They loved hockey and were really enthusiastic. I met with every single person individually who would be working on the game because, as producer, you really need to know everyone personally. We didn't have a firm plan of what this new game was going to be—originally it was an international hockey game! We had lots of design meetings, and everyone on the project contributed ideas." – Producer Mitzi McGilvray of Time Warner Interactive (*GamePro*, March 1995)



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Wayne's World

Publisher: THQ.
Developer: Gray Matter.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

While playing a video game, Wayne and Garth—"Schwing!" "Not!"—are suddenly zapped into the machine. Garth disappears inside a gelatinous cube, and it is up to Wayne to rescue his rock 'n roll buddy. This takes Wayne through four surreal locales.

In Kramer's Musical Store, Wayne will dodge such enemies as accordions, bagpipes, falling guitars, and clarinet missiles while navigating crazy scaffolding, bouncing off drums, and avoiding high wires. In Stan Makita's Donut Shop he must deal with spewing coffee cups, falling sugar cubes, steam blasts, and a grease donut monster. Gasworks is an entertainment complex filled with such enemies as darts, disco balls, gas jets, and a homing missile-firing yellow sub, while Suburbia features mailboxes, ducks, lawn sprinklers, and bouncing garbage cans.

To dodge, shoot, and otherwise fend off these foes Wayne can duck, jump (hold button to jump higher), and fire sonic booms out of his guitar. As he works his way through the game he can grab guitar power-ups. There are also special items to gather, including hearts for extra lives and "schwing" items that destroy all enemies.

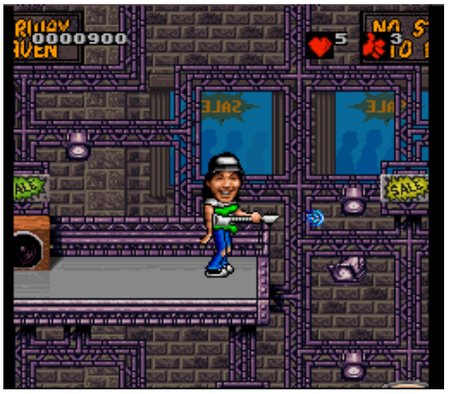
Like its virtually identical Genesis counterpart, *Wayne's World* for the SNES suffers from poor collision detection, blind jumps, lame level design, and horrible controls. The game is loosely based on the funny feature film of the same name from 1992 (starring Mike Myers and Dana Carvey) based on a *Saturday Night Live* skit.

Notable Quotable:

"With music as the theme, one may hope it would at least sound good, but this has the worst excuse for music since Leonard Nimoy's debut album. *Wayne's World* isn't even worth playing to laugh at—despite the cheesy dialogue and fashionable mullet. It sucks that bad. No way!? Way!" – *Game Informer* (April 2003)

Notable Quotable:

"Wayne looks like a bobble-head . . . the voices are redundant. Every time Wayne gets an item, he says 'excellent.' Every time he gets hit, he says, 'not.' That doesn't make any sense. What is he saying 'not' to? Usually the word 'not' follows a sarcastic statement . . . it gets incredibly aggravating to have to hear the same thing over and over again . . . the controls are awful. You can't shoot while ducking. You can accidentally jump up to a higher platform. When you land on things, you have to be at the right angle or else you'll fall through . . . Even after I've overcome the crappy learning curve, still I can't get past the first level." – The Angry Video Game Nerd (YouTube)



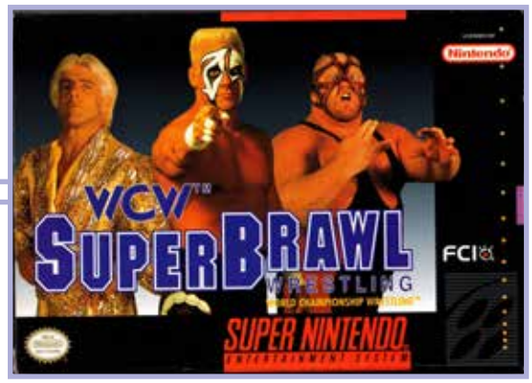
Insider Insight: There wasn't anywhere you could go in the early '90s to escape the phenomenon that was *Wayne's World*. I remember many days of sneaking my Walkman to school and listening to the cassette soundtrack to the point of almost wearing it out. When my family discovered there was a game to go along with the movie, we had to play it. Many weekend rentals were spent hiding from the sun, yet still burning up in the summer heat (we lived in Las Vegas and did not have air conditioning) playing *Wayne's World*. Its crazy bobble-headed character design and odd enemy choices made us laugh with sarcastic delight.

Even the now infamously awful rendition of "Bohemian Rhapsody" made us laugh. It was funny watching the digitized movie images as we held our ears, begging for whomever was playing at that moment to ease our pain and press the continue button to make it stop. Depending on who was playing, this would lead to some cruel torture as they laughed, watching us hold our ears.

My family never cared if a licensed game was bad. There was something fun about playing an interactive game based on a movie or TV show. *Wayne's World* has voices from the movie, music from the movie (sort of), and, most importantly, Wayne and Garth. Their 16-bit pixilated glory gave my family a lot of fun and frustration over the summer of '93. Party time! Excellent! – Zoe K. Howard

WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling

Publisher: FCI.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Sports/Wrestling, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Viewed from a ¾ overhead perspective, *WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling* is loaded with features guaranteed to make wrestling fans get off the mat and take notice, but lousy gameplay knocks it out of contention. You can wrestle solo, challenge a friend, or team up for a four-wrestler tag team brawl. You can also customize the rules and timer.

The game features ten top WCW superstars of the era: Dustin Rhodes, Vader (Leon White), Rick Rude, Ric Flair, Johnny B. Badd, Rick Steiner, Sting, Brian Pillman, Scott Steiner, Ron Simmons, Ricky Steamboat, and Barry Windham. Each fighter is equipped with a variety of moves, including punches, piledrivers, knockdowns, slams, knee-drops, dropkicks, elbow drops, and throws. Plus each has signature finishing moves, such as Ric Flair's figure four, Sting's scorpion death lock, and Brian Pillman's flying sunset flip.

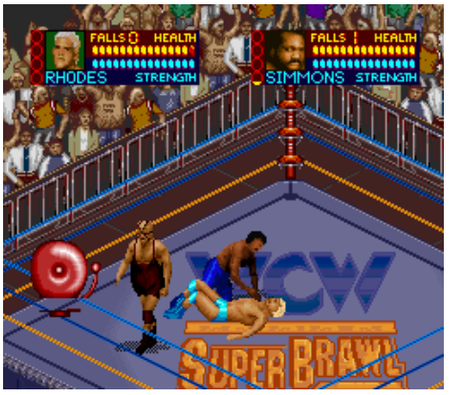
Tony Schiavone provides limited commentary, each wrestler belts out a catchphrase after performing his signature move, and the digitized menu and character selection screens are a lot of fun. Regrettably, the digitized wrestlers are sluggish and poorly animated, making for a boring and frustrating fighting experience. Named after the *SuperBrawl* pay-per-view, *WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling* is the only WCW game for the SNES.

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are down for the count. Although the sprites are large and well-rendered, they move stiffly . . . The sounds are only average . . . *WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling* has the markings of a top-notch wrestling cart with great licensing tie-ins, but its gameplay falls short. While this game shouldn't be completely written off, it doesn't deserve championship status, either." – *GamePro* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Some of the moves are just flat out incorrect; Vader is supposed to have a powerbomb, instead he has a powerslam. Barry Windham's superplex is now just a delayed vertical suplex . . . You have two health bars, one marked Health and the other marked Strength . . . I'm not even sure what they mean . . . I've seen both guys kicking out of pins with both bars empty and guys getting pinned while both meters were pretty much full . . . There's also a referee in the ring with you who has a digitized voice for counting pins or count-outs . . . Sadly, though, you can't knock him down or make him bail on the match like *WWF Raw* . . . One of the biggest reasons this game doesn't stack up against *Raw* and *Royal Rumble* is that there's simply not that much to do. *Raw* featured wild modes like the Royal Rumble and Bedlam (Tornado Tag) matches, and you could do awesome stuff like toss your opponent out of the ring and blast them with a steel chair. There's no such fun to be had here." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)



WeaponLord

Publisher: Namco Hometek.
Developer: Visual Concepts.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.

One of the bloodiest 16-bit games this side of *Mortal Kombat II*, *WeaponLord* is a one-on-one fighter featuring seven barbarian warriors, each equipped with thrusting, slashing, striking weaponry, such as a sword, a stone hammer, or an axe. Said barbarians include Korr (a swordsman), Divada (a sorceress), Bane (a cursed barbarian savage), Jen-Tai (Warrior Queen of the Arenas), Talazia (a forest-dwelling princess), Zorn (a thief), and Zarak (a new DemonLord). Each character has a different storyline, and there are a variety of battle arena backgrounds, including jungles, skulls, and fiery mountains.

Each fighter is equipped with ten special moves, such as gut smash, elbow smash, ground blast, power flip, psycho blades, inferno, power hammer, skull crusher, roll attack, rip claw, and/or death blade. These include death combos that let players decapitate, splatter, and eviscerate their opponent. Special moves are executed in three different ways: Instant-Motion Moves, which are standard; Charge-Motion Moves, where you hold a directional button for two seconds, quickly followed by the opposite direction and then an attack button; and Hold-Down Moves, where you hold down an attack button, followed by a directional motion, and then finish by releasing that attack button.

The weapons-based one-on-one combat—in which your goal is to win the DemonLord's tournament and fulfill the prophecy of the Warrior's Moon—has a lot of unusual features for a fighting game, such as weapons breaking, players hacking off clothing and hair, thrust blocking (similar to *Street Fighter III*'s Parry System, which came two years later), deflecting (similar to thrust blocking), and weapon-to-weapon (when weapons clash at the same time you struggle to overpower your opponent). Includes Arcade and Story mode. Also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"I was frightened by the innovations in gameplay. The combo system is flexible enough for *Street Fighter* two-in-ones, and what totally blew me away was the ability to link together long, sickening death combos. While the animation seems choppy sometimes, you quickly become accustomed to the game and get in that zone where the controller is an extension of your body." – *GameFan* (September 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"At first it may seem a bit underwhelming that *WeaponLord* has only seven playable characters. Most other fighters had a selection of characters in double digits by that time, so it was somewhat disappointing to see the game run with less than half of the roster compared to *Super Street Fighter II*. Yet the low count allows the characters to be particularly well balanced, and every one of them has a lot more moves than what was standard at the time. There's also an astounding amount of story presented at the start of the game, as well as in the endings, which goes a long way to pulling you into this savage world of demons and barbarians . . . Many of *WeaponLord*'s unconventional gameplay decisions actually stem from it being the first fighting game to be designed with online multiplayer in mind. *WeaponLord* was optimized for use with Xband, a then-new online multiplayer service that made it

WeaponLord

possible to play Genesis and SNES games via dial-up internet." – Hardcore Gaming 101 (hg101.kontek.net)

Notable Quotable:

"*WeaponLord* was originally designed for the Super Nintendo, and as such, was the much better-looking and sounding version of the game. There were far more colors and detail on the sprites and backgrounds, as usually was the case when it came to fighting games during the 16-bit era. Sound effects and music were also richer, and voice samples were generally clearer. The Sega Mega Drive/Genesis version also suffered from a reduced screen size, where the upper half of the screen was blacked out to display the health bars and timer. The SNES version had the upper health information floating over the stage background, as is standard in fighting titles. However, the Sega Mega Drive/Genesis version is considered the slightly faster of the two, and also worked well with the six-button Genesis controller, which was designed with fighting games in mind." – Encyclopedia Gamia (gaming.wikia.com)

Insider Insight:

I wanted this game to be good. As a 16-bit fan in the mid-'90s, I spent most of my hours honing my *Street Fighter II* skills or trying out the latest "new fighter," which always claimed to be the one to dethrone Capcom's masterpiece. I had first heard about *WeaponLord* in magazines like *GamePro* and *EGM*. They advertised a fighting game that would be like no other—one that used weapons as part of the battle.

These previews hyped the title by sharing behind-the-scenes details about the development: it was being made by ex-Capcom employees—*Street Fighter* developers no less—and they were going to include weapons and unique fighting mechanics never before seen in a game of this type. Parry and blocking mechanics would be inspired by real fighting styles. I was stoked.

Playing the game revealed a much different story. Due to memory limits several characters were cut. Large move sets were hard to learn and frequently hard to use. Popular gimmicks such as *Mortal Kombat*'s fatality system were not carried over successfully, leaving those awesome weapons each character had underutilized. Animations were so detailed, with so many frames, that the moves felt slow and choppy compared to the *Ultra/Turbo/Champion* variants of *Street Fighter* that had released. In all, *WeaponLord* was a great concept with a vision that could not live up to its expectations on a 16-bit platform. – Matt Raithel

We're Back! A Dinosaur's Story

Publisher: Hi-Tech Expressions.
Developer: Visual Concepts.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1–or 2 players (alternating).
Year: 1993.

Loosely based on the 1993 animated movie of the same name, *We're Back! A Dinosaur's Story* has you guiding a tyrannosaurus rex named Rex through five mediocre (at best), largely linear levels of platforming action, including the Jurassic era and modern day New York. Rex walks along throwing small boulders at enemies, and he can jump on them. Rex can also run, and certain leaps can only be accomplished with a running jump. By collecting brain grain Rex can do tail swipes and a special thunder stomp maneuver.

Picking up character icons lets Rex call on his pals for help. Woog knocks down blocks that bar the way or lead to areas with bonus pick-ups; Dweeb runs ahead of Rex to eliminate enemies; Elsa swoops down and carries Rex to secret bonus areas; and Vorb flies by to give Rex brain grain. The game is easy, though, so most players should be able to beat it without special moves or help from other characters—the main challenge comes from the spotty controls.

Foreground graphics are suitably cartoonish, while the backgrounds are faded in appearance and lacking in detail. The music evokes the film to a reasonable degree. The ultimate goal in this game, which is obviously aimed at kids, is to rescue Louie and Cecilia, who were kidnapped by Professor ScrewEyes. Much different than the Game Boy version, which has sixteen levels. The film was adapted for the Genesis as *A Dinosaur's Tale*, which differs considerably from the SNES and Game Boy games.

Notable Quotable:

"The little ones may enjoy this cutesy game where you get to control dinosaurs, but even they may get very frustrated with the less-than-responsive controls. However, the graphics are good." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Technically, the game is only partly evolved. The graphics are attractive, though the human sprites are stiff and cartoony. Fortunately, the perky music changes for each level, and the dinos emit good roars. Although the control needs a quick DNA fix, you can still be Jurassic on having fun with *We're Back*." – *GamePro* (November 1993)

Wheel of Fortune

Publisher: GameTek.
Developer: Imagitec Design.
Game Type: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

Based on the long-running Merv Griffin Enterprises TV game show starring Pat Sajak and Vanna White, *Wheel of Fortune* for the SNES features a cartoonish version of White (who turns the letters) and more than 4,500 new puzzles. As play begins, gamers are shown a wall of hidden letters (blank boxes) spelling out a word or words from such categories as person, place, or thing. To guess a consonant in the puzzle players spin a wheel, hoping that the wheel lands on a dollar amount or a free spin (as opposed to bankrupt or miss a turn).

Unlike the Genesis version, which shows only a small portion of the wheel, the SNES game goes to a separate screen showing a large wheel. Players can choose to buy a vowel in lieu of guessing a consonant, or they can bypass the wheel altogether and attempt to solve the puzzle. A bonus round at the end of each two-out-of-three match lets the winner compete for a valuable prize. Includes voice effects and six different contestants. Fans of the show who do not mind the 16-bit trappings (such as the slow pace and dated graphics and sounds) will enjoy this interactive version of the game.

Wheel of Fortune was also adapted for the NES, game.com, Game Boy, Game Gear, Sega CD (featuring 6,000 puzzles, CD-quality theme music, and full motion video footage of Vanna White), and numerous other systems.

Notable Quotable:

"Sure, it feels like the gameshow of the same name and fame, but does anybody really want that on their SNES? The game has over 4,000 puzzles, but even so, it just isn't very exciting." – *Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:

"The biggest problem with *Wheel of Fortune* is that it's wholeheartedly devoted to the idea of trying to recreate the television experience. There are cuts to the contestants clapping after every spin. You have to sit and watch Vanna White walk across the game board and flip over letters. You have to sit through the computer typing out answers or thinking about how hard to spin the wheel. Everything involves waiting . . . *Wheel of Fortune* does provide the option to play solo, which speeds up the game significantly. There's something depressing about playing a *Wheel of Fortune* game by yourself, though. It's like playing both sides of checkers at the same time." – Cory Woodrum (snesaday.com)

Wheel of Fortune: Deluxe Edition

Publisher: GameTek.
Developer: Imagitec Design.
Game Type: Game Show, 1–3 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

In *Wheel of Fortune: Deluxe Edition*, you—standing before a wall of hidden letters that will eventually spell out one of more than 4,500 phrases, places, things, or events—must spin a giant wheel and hope the pointer lands on a high dollar amount. If the wheel, which is pictured on another screen, does land on any of the dollar amounts, you can either try to buy a vowel (if you have accumulated at least $250 in the current round) or guess a consonant. If you guess a consonant correctly in the puzzle, you score points and get to continue spinning. If you successfully buy a vowel you do not score any cash, but it is still your turn and the puzzle is that much closer to being solved.

During any of your turns you may choose to solve the puzzle before or after you guess a letter correctly. If the wheel stops on BANKRUPT or LOSE A TURN, or if you run out of time, then it is automatically the next player's turn. If the wheel lands on FREE SPIN you can use it right away or save it for later in the round. Rounds two through four are similar to round one, except higher dollar amounts are added to the wheel. Round five is a speed-up round in which the wheel is spun for you. If you are determined the winner, you get to play a bonus round by yourself.

You can play the game against the computer, or you can compete against one or two friends. The game includes digitized speech from Vanna White (a cartoonish version of her turns the letters), digitized contestants, and digitized photography of the actual *Wheel of Fortune* set.

Notable Quotable:

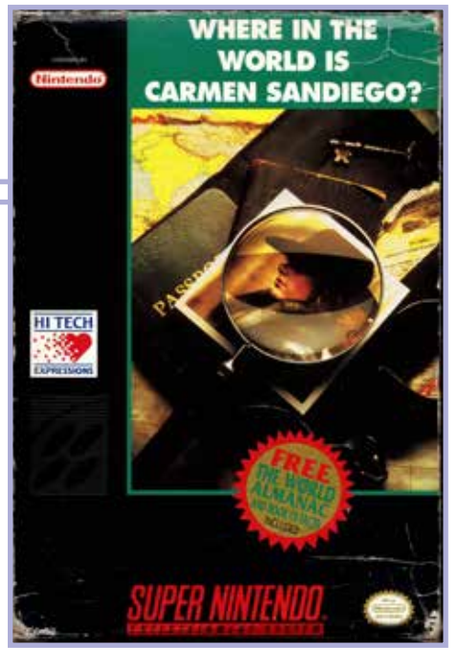
"A good job of recreating the TV show, albeit within the abilities of the SNES . . . I feel practically the same about *Wheel of Fortune: Deluxe Edition* as I did about *Family Feud* on the SNES. My friend and I had a good time playing it, but there are newer, better versions available." – My Brain on Games (mybrainongames.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This is a pretty slow game, even when you play against two friends. The graphics and sounds don't add much. A clicky wheel, a board with squares, lounge music—oh, boy. Unlike *Jeopardy!*, *WOF* doesn't test your knowledge, it tests your ability to guess and spell. Should I spin? Solve the puzzle? Buy a vowel? If these strategic questions appeal to you, take this wheel for a spin. Otherwise, roll on by." – *GamePro* (June 1994)

Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?

Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions.
Developer: Electronic Arts.
Game Type: Educational/Geography/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1993.



Originally packaged with a helpful paperback copy of *The World Almanac and Book of Facts*, *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* for the SNES is an updating of the 1985 Broderbund computer semi-classic that spawned a PBS game show. You begin the game as a rookie detective at ACME Detective Agency, where your primary objective is to capture the world's greatest thief, Carmen Sandiego.

The action is divided into a number of cases you must solve to progress from rookie, to sleuth, to private eye, to investigator, to ace detective, to retirement. After being given a mission (usually recovering a stolen artifact) and a few hints, you will do such things as use a crime computer, track the criminal's movements, explore cities (going to the wrong location wastes time), enter buildings, and interrogate witnesses to glean such information as the suspect's appearance, location, and hobbies. You will also need to obtain an arrest warrant.

If time runs out or you try to apprehend the crook without obtaining the proper warrant, the suspect will go free. The game can be played in five languages and features digitized graphics, hundreds of cases, and briefings on geography and culture around the globe. Also released for the Genesis and Master System.

Notable Quotable:

"The great graphics include lots of little entertaining touches, considering the non-action gameplay. As for sound and music, they're adequate, if minimal. If you need a little geography lesson, *Carmen Sandiego* will put you on the right track." – *GamePro* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"This game has real nostalgia for anyone who sat in a classroom in the '80s or '90s and played *Carmen Sandiego* on their Apple II computers. Playing it on a Super Nintendo is easier than tracking down a computer with a floppy drive, though playing on a large TV screen is a slightly different experience. The graphics are more colorful than the old VGA DOS ports, and the little bad guy animations are more fluid. Other than that, it's pretty much the same experience. The only downside now is that the game isn't very hard. Besides the fact that we're older and more knowledgeable about the world, and that we have ready access to the internet for research, a lot of the clues tend to repeat." – Simon (Amazon reviewer)

Notable Quotable:

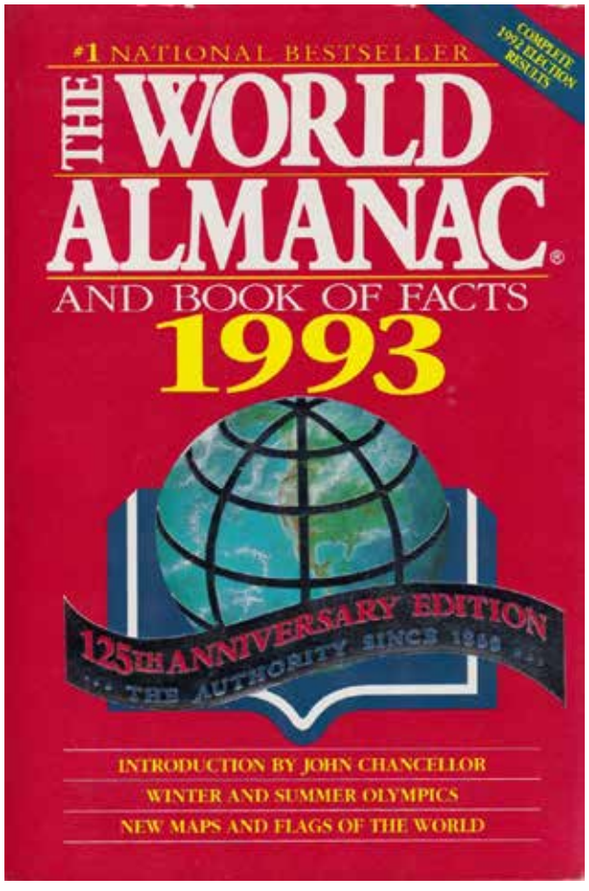
"The gameplay is very simple. In a city, visit one of three sites. If the clue is not enough,

or you want to see if other locations give you a description of the criminal, then you visit another site. The clues are all basically something about the flag or country that you need to go to next. When you have enough clues about the identity, you enter those things into your computer to generate a warrant before you catch the criminal. Otherwise you lose the case . . . In the early stages, the time limit hardly matters. But toward the end, the cases can get trickier and you have to move faster . . . There is nothing great about the graphics, but each city that you visit has a different view that is appropriate to each city . . . This is a good game for educational purposes for kids . . . it teaches about geography." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Insider Insight:
As a kid in elementary school, I got awesome grades. We're talking 99s on city- and state-wide tests, straight-As—I was a nerd. My twin brother was a wild maniac. He looked like and still does resemble the kid from that awful flick, *Problem Child*. He hated school, and as a result had to get tutored before school. So poor me, I had to go with him because my parents had to work. Quiet and reserved, I was able to chill out in another room while my brother was tutored. They had an old computer there, and I would spend an hour and a half every morning playing *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* As I was already in love with history and geography, it quickly became one of my favorite games.

On a trip to the video store one evening when I was eleven years old, I saw it: *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* on the Super Nintendo! I was super excited. This was before the internet and E3, and way before I was fully engrossed in the industry. The video store was where the games came, and when they did, you got excited. Playing *Carmen* on the SNES was a blast and furthered my love for academics.

A college professor now and having the opportunity to interview the game's chief developer Dane Bigham for my book, *The Minds Behind the Games*, I think it is crazy that Bigham almost walked away from the project at one point. Did you just hear that? I thought I just heard millions of thirty-somethings scream at the thought of *Where in the World Is Carmen Sandiego?* almost never existing. – Patrick Hickey Jr.



Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego?

Publisher: Hi Tech Expressions.
Developer: Electronic Arts.
Game Type: Educational/Geography/Adventure, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Originally packaged with a convenient paperback copy of *The New American Desk Encyclopedia*, *Where in Time Is Carmen Sandiego?* finds the titular thief and her Villains International League of Evil traveling through time, stealing history's treasures. To save the day (or at least the artifacts) you will search locations all over the world, talk to witnesses and informers, scan areas for items, decipher clues (such as "He was sneaking off to Runnymede to watch King John sign the Magna Carta," "He has hair as dark as midnight," and "She loves pastels by a French impressionist"), and track down Carmen and her fifteen criminal cohorts. In addition to finding out where Carmen is you have to discover when she is.

When closing in on a suspect you can sic the Capture Robot on him or her, but it is important to have the proper arrest warrant prior to doing so. To travel through time you use a "chronoskimmer." The game can be played in five languages (English, French, Spanish, German, and Italian) and features 1,500 years of history, twelve countries (China, England, France, Holland, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Russia, Spain, and the United States), more than 1,200 clues, and a variety of historical events, inventions, and people. There are seven levels and hundreds of cases. Also released for the NES and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"It is a little bit of fun . . . especially when two friends who are interested in history are playing together as a team (though there is no two-player mode)" – *Video Game Bible, 1985-2002* (2002, Trafford Publishing)

Notable Quotable:
"The actual 'goals' of the various missions are just comical robberies in various time periods. They will be things such as 'Emperor's white horse stolen from Japan, 1950' or 'City of Chan Chan stolen from Peru, 900.' These are just random excuses to get you zipping off through time and aren't particularly realistic . . . Each time period you visit, when you first arrive, shows you a picture from the area, as well as a description of the time and place. The pictures it shows are fairly interesting and look nice enough. On the other side, you have the display of your time-traveling device which you use to gather information. Nothing fancy, but it works fine. When you're on the correct track of the criminal and arrive at a new location they visited, you'll see a little animated scene with a 'suspicious character' doing something like poking their head out of a barrel or shooting a gun at you or something. Again, there's nothing really exciting going on there graphically, but they keep things interesting . . . the game has no background music whatsoever. There are little sound effects when your device is processing information or when you're traveling to a new place or such, which at least tell you that the game isn't on mute . . . Even for someone with a good knowledge of history, the game still provides a decent challenge. The time limit that it gives you to track down the criminal definitely makes things very tight." – GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

Whizz

Publisher: Titus Software.
Developer: Flair Software.
Game Type: Isometric Platformer/Maze/Action Puzzle, 1 player.
Year: 1996.

An unusual platformer with an isometric (¾) view of the action, *Whizz* puts you in the role of a tux-wearing magician rabbit as he zigzags (he only moves in four directions—diagonally) around a series of timed, obstacle-filled mazes, using a spin attack to dispense with such enemies as crabs, sharks, dragons, gators, penguins, snakes, playing cards, rolling snowballs, and spinning triangles. Spinning into enemies and obstacles depletes Whizz's health, so the maneuver should be used judiciously. The game takes place in four multi-stage worlds: South Seas Beaches, Frozen Arctic Waste, Green Grassed Castle, and Indoor World of Gamesville.

The action in *Whizz* is fast, whimsical, and puzzling (as in there are puzzles throughout) as Whizz jumps over gaps, rides in submarines, bounces up to higher platforms, pulls levers, dodges and rides chess pieces, uses keys to open four different types of doors (you must have the right type of key), slides down icy hills, negotiates hidden traps, gets shot out of cannons, rides boats and surfboards, and much more, including pushes buttons to create staircases, elevators, and bridges. The goal in each stage is to reach a hot air balloon within a given time, making the game somewhat frantic in nature, but you can grab hourglasses to increase the remaining time. There are also gems and flags to grab for extra points, and you can launch hidden rockets for extra points and lives.

Fans of games like *Congo Bongo*, *Crystal Castles*, *Sonic 3D Blast*, and *Gubble* may want to spend some time playing this obscure cartridge adapted from the 1994 computer game. *Whizz* was also ported to the PlayStation and Saturn, but only in Japan and Europe.

Notable Quotable:

"This game doesn't seem entirely unlovable, but I definitely don't like it much. Even without the harsh time limit, the controls and isometric view make it a pain in the ass to get around. It's weird how they ported it to the Saturn and PSX, but didn't give it a full 3D makeover, when the game's crying out for one." – Super Adventures in Gaming (superadventuresingaming.blogspot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"This *Super Mario* variation on *Crystal Castles* is straightforward and plain, and its controls are appropriately reduced: one button jumps and the other button makes Whizz do his attack . . . it's not as exciting as a series of missions about getting from point A to point B should ideally be . . . Whizz moves around quickly, too quickly to let the dangers of his situation take root. His inability to fall off of the board further softens the challenge, but at least with that mechanic in place it can draw attention to how the time limit is the biggest concern . . . The main hook to *Whizz* is that it's whimsical and bright and ideal for young kids." – SNES Hub (playingwithsuperpower.com)

Wicked 18

Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software.
Developer: T&E Soft.
Game Type: Sports/Golf, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Known as *New 3D Golf Simulation: Devil's Course* in Japan, *Wicked 18* is a successor to *Pebble Beach* and *Waialae Country Club*. Instead of traditional courses, *Wicked 18* offers eighteen holes of "fantasy" golf riddled with such unconventional hazards as lava, giant statues, huge bunkers, narrow canyons, floating chunks of earth, and steep hills and mountains. There are also trees, water hazards, and sand traps, along with wind conditions to consider. A series of screen prompts lets you select a club, aim, adjust your stance, select the point of impact (via a red dot zig-zagging across a golf ball icon), and select the power of the shot (via a circular swing meter).

The view is from behind your golfer, and there is an overhead look at the entire hole on the right side of the screen. Battery backup saves stats, course records, and up to ten created golfers, and there are five modes of play: Tournament, Stroke Play, Skins Play, Match Play, and Practice. Polygonal graphics give the game a decent pseudo-3D look.

Sometimes referred to as *True Golf Classics: Wicked 18*, the SNES game has better music than its 3DO counterpart, but the 3DO version has voice effects and smoother, more detailed graphics. Also released for the Mega Drive, but not the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:
"If you're bored with the conventional golf carts on the market and you want great graphics and a challenging course, then *Wicked 18* should be a stop on your golf tour." – *GamePro* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"The uniqueness of the course makes *Wicked 18* fun to try out. Once you've learned the techniques needed to maintain a low score, however, you may search elsewhere for greener grass." – *Game Players* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Attractive female caddies accompany the players on full-round play and offer advice and the occasional comment. Remarks like 'Keep your eye on the ball' are dumb for a video game but it's really nice to get one like 'Sweet drive—did you ever think of going on tour?'" – *Electronic Games* (January 1994)

Wild Guns

Publisher: Natsume.
Developer: Natsume.
Game Type: Third-Person 3D Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

Like the movie *Westworld* (1973), *Wild Guns* is a western with overriding sci-fi elements. Viewing the action from behind their cowboy (Clint) or cowgirl (Annie), players guide a crosshair around the screen while simultaneously controlling the movements of the character, dodging or jumping over bullets while firing away at bad guys, robots, and other enemies and targets. The game takes place in six shooting gallery-style levels: Carson City, Desolation Canyon, Ammunition Depot, Gold Mine, Armored Train, and Final Fight. Each of the six levels is divided into three sublevels, with the third always being a boss battle.

Most enemies take more than one shot to kill from your default gun, but you can upgrade to a shotgun, machine gun, and grenade launcher. You can also grab a pea shooter, but it is even weaker than your standard gun. When the meter on the bottom left side of the screen gets full you will brandish a Vulcan for a few seconds. This powerful weapon shoots fast, effects a large area, and can easily defeat bosses. Your other weapon is a lasso, which stuns enemies. A second player can join in for a little couch co-op action, the most enjoyable way to play the game.

An enhanced remaster of the game called *Wild Guns: Reloaded* hit the PlayStation 4 in 2016. It was developed by the original team and features classic characters and stages, but it offers more playable characters, more enemies, more stages, and up to four-player support.

Notable Quotable:

"This is a fantastic multiplayer game with no slowdown or lag or any technical limitations getting in the way. The gameplay is still very smooth and responsive, despite all the stuff going on." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"*Wild Guns* succeeds at being fun thanks to the frantic gameplay—things are shooting at you constantly—and the nifty graphics, which combine the expected Old West look with futuristic themes. (The massive robot boss at the end of the first level is a perfect example.)" – *Video Games & Computer Entertainment* (November 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"One of the best shoot-'em-ups for the Super NES system! The two-player simultaneous play and very challenging levels make this one a real blast. It seems to go by a bit too fast (and is very reminiscent of the Neo arcade shooter *Nam '75*), but that is more tribute to how good the game is." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"The game plays very quick. Blink too often, and you'll end up seeing the 'game over' screen before you empty your six-shooter. The controls, which indeed take a fresh approach, can become cumbersome as you try to dodge enemy fire while getting in a few shots to take down some baddies . . . Once you get the hang of the controls, the game itself is an enjoyable experience . . . a very satisfying shooter . . . recommended to anyone who likes a little sci-fi mixed with their western. It looks good, plays fast, and has enough to keep you and a friend firing away again and again." – Evan Phelps (Spring 2007, *Video Game Colllector* #9)

Insider Insight:
As vast as the SNES library is, I had thought that as an adult I had seen it all. Then I saw some footage of *Wild Guns* on YouTube and was blown away. It is the very definition of a hidden gem. Set in the Old West with mechs of all shapes and sizes, this arcade-style shooter is one of the few that has a capable control scheme without the use of a light gun. Beware, though: while the shooting is incredibly fun, with outstanding music that drives the action, your characters can only take one hit. Luckily, skilled sharpshooters can shoot enemy bullets out of the air and gain the Vulcan gun to decimate the screen.

Wild Guns is one of the best co-operative experiences on the SNES. Having a second player join in definitely evens the odds, but the screen can get cluttered with bullets and explosions to make things more confusing for new players. I did not play *Wild Guns* until I was an adult, but it felt so modern and precise that it was hard to believe I was playing it on the SNES.

An improved version found its way to the PS4, both digitally and physically. This opened up the fantastic experience of *Wild Guns* to a new generation, and rightfully so. This is definitely a game worth remembering. I have invited more friends to a quick game of *Wild Guns* than I have most modern experiences. My friends enjoy the fast-paced action, and we have had many an epic game night because of it. – Alex McCumbers

WildC.A.T.S: Covert Action Teams, Jim Lee's

Publisher: Playmates Interactive Entertainment.
Developer: Beam Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1995.

Based on the WildStorm comic book and on the animated series (1994–1995, one thirteen-episode season), *WildC.A.T.S* is a solid representation of the type of beat-'em-up (supplemented by some mediocre platforming) that was so popular during the 1990s. You begin the game as Spartan (cyborg and team leader), who can fire a special laser attack. After the first section of the game you can select from Spartan, Maul (a hulking cross-breed warrior who can do a grabbing move and a charging attack), and Warblade (who can climb walls and emit long blades from his fingers). Each character can punch, kick, and jump, and each has specific missions, such as Spartan stopping Helspont from using a bio-generator and Maul locating and destroying an anti-gravity machine. Gamers can combine the heroes to create more powerful moves.

Grifter, Zealot, and Voodoo are not playable, and there is no two-player mode, which is a shame. Enemies include Attica (on a forklift), Daemonites, Bikers, Darkmen, Drones, and Razors, among others. The final battle is against Helspont, who wants to destroy the world. The graphics are nice, as is the music by Tommy Tallarico, who went on to create the *Video Games Live* concert series.

Notable Quotable:

"After a while, the enemies are all similar and the levels get old and repetitive. Punching and kicking my way through this game did not hold my attention for very long and basically made me yawn." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"This game borrows heavily from lots of other TV cartoon-based games. There's not much new here and the music and sound effects are particularly bad. All you'll get out of this is 10 really sore fingers and a bunch of regret." – *Game Players* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Jim Lee may be one of the hottest artists in comics today, but his original creations in the mid-'90s weren't so hot. His *WildC.A.T.s* comic was little more than an *X-Men* rip-off with a more 'extreme' attitude, so it's not surprising that the game based on the book is nothing special either." – *Game Informer* (May 2005)

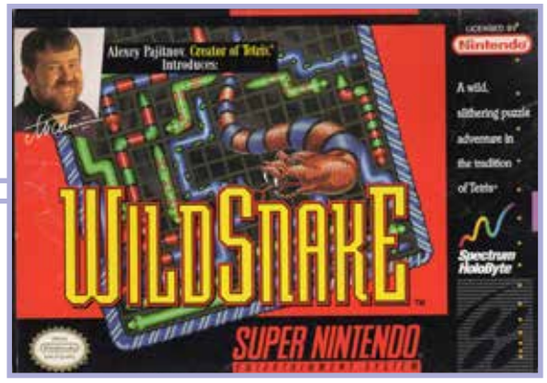
Insider Insight:
I have never read a single issue of *WildC.A.T.S*, but I got a basic knowledge of the superhero team by reading through my brother's issues of *Wizard* magazine. As with many comic book properties back then, my real education came when the comic was adapted into a Saturday morning cartoon. Overnight I knew all about the characters, like Spartan, Grifter, and Warblade, but the biggest takeaway was the amazing theme song. I could not tell you the plot of one episode of *WildC.AT.S* and I probably saw them all, but I could sing you the entire theme song on a moment's notice.

I discovered *Jim Lee's WildC.A.T.S: Covert Action Team* when it was reviewed in an issue of *Game Players* magazine. I do not recall it getting a particularly high score or glowing review, but I told myself that I would at least give it a rental if it happened to show up at one of the few places around my hometown that rented SNES games. It never did, and it wasn't until a few years ago when I ordered it online that I actually got to try the game.

It turns out that *Game Players* was right, as *WildC.A.T.S* is just one of many generic superhero action brawlers. Each of the three characters you control has a unique play style, but when the game tries to be anything other than a beat-'em-up it gets bad. For example, Warblade has wall-climbing segments like Wolverine in *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse*, but it is executed very poorly. I do give points for the music done by Tommy Tallarico, though; the opening moments feature a glorious 16-bit rendition of the cartoon's theme song. – Blair Farrell

WildSnake

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte.
Developer: Manley & Associates.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.



Endorsed by *Tetris* creator Alexey Pajitnov, *WildSnake* is a slithering attempt to recreate *Tetris* magic, but it comes up a little short. Players guide creeping, crawling snakes (boa, garter, water, mambo, python, cobra, etc.) of different colors, designs, and lengths down the playfield, trying to match up snakes of the same type to make them disappear. If the pile of snakes reaches the top of the screen it's game over.

In one-player mode you can select from seven different grid shapes: standard (vertical rectangle), T square, plus, flask, diablo (hourglass shape), obstacle (playfield that is littered with obstacle blocks), and X. There are also different backgrounds with thematic music to match, including desert, forest, water, and grass. There are two types of special snakes: Wild Snake, which eliminates all the snakes that match the first snake it touches; and King Cobra, which falls straight down (without your input) and eliminates all the snakes in its path.

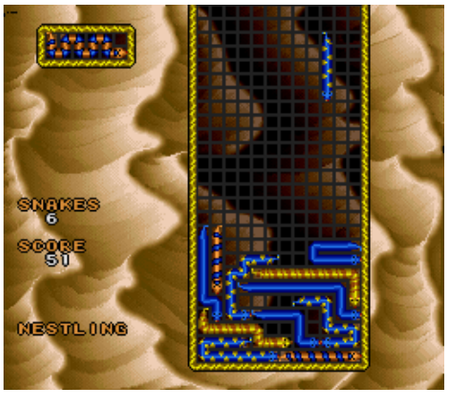
Matching up snakes is not as satisfying as fitting together the blocks in *Tetris*, but the fact that the snakes keep moving until they reach a dead end does make for a different type of challenge. Also nice is the two-player split-screen mode, where you try to outlast and outscore your opponent. In this mode—played at normal difficulty with only the standard grid shape—making two or more matches with one snake creates obstacle blocks on your opponent's screen. A special one-player King Cobra Challenge mode tests your speed and accuracy as you try to complete such challenges as eliminating a set number of snakes of a specific color.

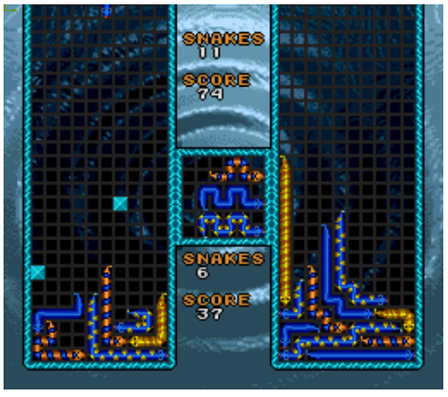
Notable Quotable:

"*WildSnake*'s an intriguing puzzler. It would've benefited from more two-player strategies . . . If you love this style of game, though, for heaven's sake, try it." – *GamePro* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:

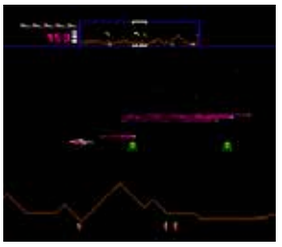
"The greatest thing about the game is that the snakes give off the impression of being real living creatures. They behave like snakes, not like blocks. For example, the snake always leads with its head, and its body follows . . . the controls are not as precise as *Tetris*, and it isn't always possible to position the snake exactly where you want it. The pacing, therefore, is rather frenetic . . . Like water, the snake will continue to move until it has reached the lowest point in the pile. This gives the impression that the snake is unpredictable and has a mind of its own. That being said, it's very easy to get into a groove with *WildSnake* once you've become accustomed to the controls. Even in the higher modes of difficulty, the game takes it easy on you for quite a while before becoming noticeably taxing . . . In terms of graphics, the game offers the player a choice of background themes, which include things like forest, water, and desert, each accompanied by its own average-quality musical ditty. Yet it's really the amount of variety in the snakes that keeps the game from being another drab middle-of-the-road visual effort. That and the rather cool opening animation of a king cobra launching himself at the screen with mouth and fangs gaping." – Honest Gamers (www.honestgamers.com)





Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits

Publisher: Williams Entertainment.
Developer: Digital Eclipse Software.
Game Type: Multi-Game Compilation, 1–2 players (alternating, simultaneous).
Year: 1996.

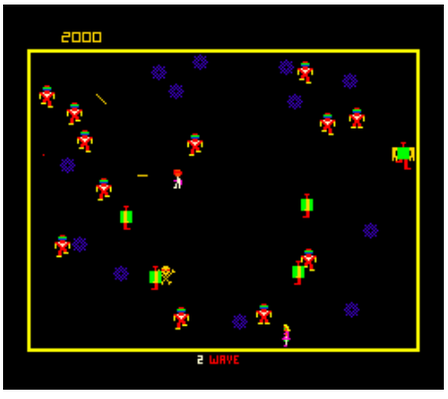


Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits features straightforward ports of five great classics: *Defender*, *Defender II*, *Joust*, *Robotron: 2084*, and *Sinistar*. In *Defender*—the first ever side-scrolling shooter—your blaster ship is the only hope the human race has against sinister aliens. You will fly around a wraparound planet, saving humanoids while blasting Mutants, Landers, Baiters, and other space scum out of the sky. *Defender II*—also known as *Stargate*—is similar to *Defender*, but with warp capabilities, new enemies, and an Inviso button that renders the ship temporarily invulnerable. Both games have hyperspace and smart bombs.

Joust is classic kill or be killed, as you fly an ostrich in a futuristic, continual jousting competition against multiple foes. To win a joust against one of the swarming, egg-laying Buzzard Riders you must have your mount higher than your opponent's mount at the time of contact. To keep your ostrich afloat you must continually tap the button. Beneath the lowest platform on the screen is a fiery pit and the Troll of the Lava Pits, who will reach up and grab you if your ostrich gets too low. *Joust* is the only game in this collection with two-player simultaneous action.

Robotron: 2084 has you running from and shooting wave after wave of deadly robots intent on killing every last human family on Earth. You can run and shoot in all directions within each rectangular room and rescue innocents for extra points. *Sinistar* is an *Asteroids*-like game where you commandeer a space cruiser, shooting alien ships and trying to collect enough minerals for a bomb to destroy Sinistar, a giant, trash-talking ship intent on eating everything, including you.

Each game is nicely ported, and there is a lot of intense, challenging, old-school fun to be had here, but *Robotron* suffers from lack of dual joystick control. The superior PlayStation and Saturn versions include an additional game, *Bubbles*, along with such extras as video, concept art, and original debug menus. The Dreamcast version, which also includes the bonus features, is called *Midway's Greatest Arcade Hits Volume 1*. *Williams Arcade's Greatest Hits* was also released for the Genesis and game.com.



Notable Quotable:

"The idea of having multiple arcade classics on a console powerful enough to properly play them was an amazing thing . . . All the games are fun to play . . . will bring back all sorts of arcade memories. I suggest the PlayStation version of this compilation for truer graphics, but this is a fun romp through the '80s." – 8-bit Central (www.8-bitcentral.com)

Notable Quotable:

"These are all great games . . . The sounds are great, the colors are cool, and the controls are tight . . . simple to play . . . yet becoming adept required actual practice instead of learning how to manipulate algorithms. When a simple game can yield a diversity of experiences without complicated requirements, then a true masterpiece it is." – Moby Games (www.mobygames.com)

Wing Commander

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Origin Systems.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

Wing Commander for the SNES is a respectable port of Chris Roberts' popular 1990 computer game, which brought cinematic, character-driven storytelling to the combat simulator formula. The outer space action takes place in the twenty-seventh century, with you as a rookie pilot in the refurbished Tiger's Claw carrier ship. Onboard you go from room to room (Officer's Club, Barracks, and Briefing Room), learning about your comrades-in-arms and your combat mission, and then it is on to fight the evil Kilrathi, a race of catlike warriors.

The Tiger's Claw carries four types of Terran fighter craft you will commandeer: Hornet, Scimitar, Raptor, and Rapier. In addition to standard moves, such as turns, dives, and climbs, the fighters are capable of more advanced maneuvers, such as burnout, fishhook, hard brake, shake, tail, and tight loop. As you fly through space firing missiles, mines, lasers, guns, and cannons at Kilrathi vessels, your viewpoint is from inside the cockpit. The view screen shows outer space directly in front of you, crosshairs show where the ship's weapons are aimed, and a circular radar displays distant enemies and allies. Other displays show indicators for armor, shields, fuel, speed, and blaster (the power level of your ship's active gun). There is also an eject warning light that flashes if your ship sustains heavy damage.

Wing Commander features five types of flight missions: defend (guard a stationary position); escort (guard a larger ship on rendezvous assignments); intercept (seek out and engage enemies in a particular area); patrol (fly through unsecured territory and determine if you should engage enemies or return to base); and strike (destroy an enemy target, such as a capital ship). Communication plays a big role in the game, such as commanding your wingman to attack the enemy attacking you. Cut-scenes and pseudo-3D graphics are included. The Sega CD version has digitized voice effects (as opposed to simple text matched with moving mouths).

Notable Quotable:
"Despite its near-perfect reproduction of the original, it is unlikely to blow away the average SNES owner. In the wake of a contest such as *Super Star Wars*, this program loses some of its sparkle. Nonetheless, it is a good game." – *Electronic Games* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"It's a solid representation of the PC original considering the Super NES's 3D limitations, so fans will love it. However, we can't help feeling the original was vastly overrated, translating into a very average Super Nintendo game." – *Super Play* (March 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"I wasn't expecting anything to impress me at all graphically, but the briefing and lounge area have some incredible graphics . . . The flying graphics are decent but plain. You can see your character's lap and hand, and the flight stick moves when you steer your ship, but the graphics of the approaching ships didn't fare as well . . . The music, although not bad, is pleasant and relaxing but doesn't seem to fit the game well . . . There are sound effects for firing, missile shots, and when you accelerate, but they are really bland and don't use the SNES to its strengths . . . Control is very responsive. However, there is a steep learning curve . . . Action is really slow." – Doug Jackson (www.digitpress.com)

Insider Insight:
I remember the days when computers were always considered superior to such home consoles as the Super Nintendo and Sega Genesis. With games like *Wolfenstein 3D* and *DOOM*, it was easy to see how people might have that impression. *Wing Commander* on PC was no exception—a phenomenal game. So to hear that it was coming out on the Super Nintendo, many of us were indeed a bit skeptical. I remember my sister's fiancé said to forget it; he thought that there was no way it would be any good. Having been more of a console gamer myself, I was a little more lenient when it came to the format. My family did not have a powerful PC back then and none of us knew how to handle hardware upgrades.

Images of the console version of *Wing Commander* started appearing in gaming magazines for the upcoming release, and they looked pretty good. My anticipation was growing, as was my doubt, as the game moved closer to release. Much to my delight, the cinematics remained intact, and the music was just as fantastic. The controls were a little confusing at first, but it took very little time to get used to them. The game honestly felt like the PC original; something I had not seen in a console game up until that point. Even my sister's fiancé took notice of how well the game had been translated. This was the first time I felt the consoles had really matured and caught up with the technology. My thoughts ran wild, thinking of what other games could actually make it across all the platforms. – Zoe K. Howard

Wing Commander: The Secret Missions

Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Origin Systems.
Game Type: Space Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Wing Commander: The Secret Missions continues the adventures of the Tiger's Claw carrier ship, which must venture into enemy space in pursuit of the Kilrathi strike fleet. Your ultimate goal is to destroy a weapon that is capable of eliminating entire planets.

The Tiger's Claw features four types of fighter craft: the Hornet Light Fighter, the Scimitar Medium Fighter, the Raptor Heavy Fighter, and the Rapier Medium Fighter. While on the Tiger's Claw you will move from room to room, talking to people and learning about your flight mission. In the Officer's Club you will relax, meet the crew, and train on basic flying skills. In the Briefing Room, Colonel Halcyon will tell you where to fly and what to do. After a mission (there are seventeen in all), you will return here for a mission report and debriefing with the colonel.

There are five types of flight missions, each similar to what you will find in the original *Wing Commander*: defend (guard a stationary position); escort (guard a larger ship on rendezvous assignments); intercept (seek out and engage enemies in a particular area); patrol (fly through unsecured territory and determine if you should engage enemies or return to base); and strike (destroy an enemy target, such as a capital ship). Unlike the original *Wing Commander*, this game does not feature a branching mission tree—you play them in order.

You view the action from the cockpit of your fighter, and you can steer right, left, up, and down. You can also eject, increase and decrease speed, engage autopilot, initiate afterburner, cycle through gun types, fire the selected weapon (you are equipped with various types of guns and missiles), cycle between damage display and weapons display, and select between navigation, targeting, and communications functions. Each ship features the same basic cockpit equipment: flight controls, armor and shield indicators, radar display, fuel gauge, speed and blaster indicators, and right and left video display unit. A circle with crosshairs shows where your guns are aimed, and much of the action consists of targeting enemy ships, heading toward them, and destroying them.

Unlike the original 1990 computer version of the game—an add-on campaign to the original *Wing Commander—The Secret Missions* for the SNES is a standalone cartridge. Followed by *Super Wing Commander* (3DO).

Notable Quotable:

"This is the second *Wing Commander* game for the SNES, and it falls short of the original. The scrolling and action are incredibly choppy . . . This was a good idea, but it just didn't turn out very well." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (November 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"Mindscape improved the flight mechanics of the game so that combat and regular flight are much smoother . . . a perfect game for the Super NES. The cinematic scenes that tell the story behind the missions and the other graphic touches come across so well on this machine. Animations are smooth, and Mode 7 effects abound in combat as ships get closer and sneak away. The cockpits are cleanly drawn so that players never have to struggle to reach the gauges and other displays . . . Music changes to match the current mission situation, whether a tense struggle with a Kilrathi pilot or the end of a successful mission. The sound effects match the action and make *The Secret Missions* even more exciting with the volume up all the way . . . highly replayable and addictive." – *Electronic Games* (September 1993)

Insider Insight:
In an era when video game sequels rarely came with a storyline other than "get the bad guy!", *Wing Commander: The Secret Missions* was a welcome title. Outside the RPG world, story in games was often very slim. It was with this thought that I clung to the *Wing Commander* franchise. I wasn't the best at flying games, but I always had a great time playing and talking to all the characters aboard the Tiger's Claw. Each mission I made it through intrigued me, knowing I would get to hear more about what was happening. Not much changed technically with this game from the first one, but it didn't need to. My younger self was okay with the graphics and controls, and the music and sound effects are spot-on to its PC counterpart.

What made this release especially enjoyable for me was the fact that it was for the home console. We did not have a computer that could run these games at the time, so it allowed us to enjoy what PC gamers were already playing. I did have a pretty serious debate with my computer gamer friends over the fact that the PC version was cheaper because it was an add-on to the first game. I didn't know anything about PC upgrading and was scared to open up electronics back then, so to me a console port was easily worth the extra money. – Zoe K. Howard

Wings 2: Aces High

Publisher: Namco Hometek.
Developer: Malibu Interactive.
Game Type: Flight Combat Simulator, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

The sequel to the 1990 Amiga game *Wings*, *Wings 2: Aces High* is an arcade-style World War I game in which you view the bulk of the action from behind your Sopwith Camel or Folker D.VII biplane. You can roll your plane side-to-side, bank during turns, slow down and speed up, move the nose up and down to ascend and descend, and fire machine guns at enemy aircraft. You can even fly upside down. There is no aiming reticle, and your plane can block your view, so hitting your targets is a challenge. Fortunately bullets are unlimited.

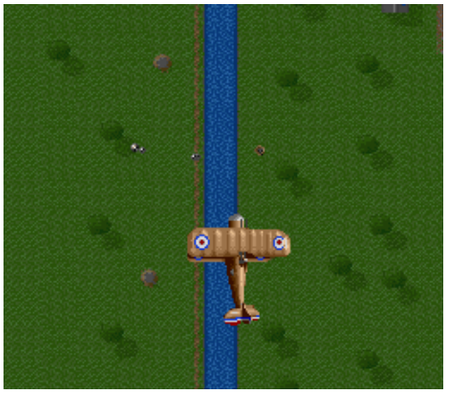
There are three types of missions: dog fighting, where you shoot enemies out of the air; strafing, where you fly low to shoot ground-based targets; and bombing, which are top-down missions where you destroy enemy bridges, munitions factories, and the like. You will fly as five different pilots from WWI—Manfred Von Richthofen (a.k.a. the Red Baron), Max Immelmann, Billy Bishop, Georges Guyner, and Eddie Rickenbacker—each of whom can be upgraded in four areas: flying, shooting, mechanics, and stamina. The game has nice graphics, and the instruction manual has some photos from and historical info on WWI. Based on the Japanese title, *Sky Mission*. Released in Europe as *Blazing Skies*.

Notable Quotable:

"The game looks really, really good . . . the airplanes are quite detailed . . . it controls fairly well, although you'll find it to be somewhat stiff . . . accurate aiming is all but impossible . . . You kinda just have to point your plane at the enemy and just let [the bullets] fly." – CGR Undertow (YouTube)

Notable Quotable:

"The lore of the World War I fighter ace was an idea worth making a game out of, and dogfighting feels believable and can get tense at times if you're chasing a bandit and realize you're being pursued by his wingman, or if an enemy is roaring towards you . . . Bombing and strafing are a bit iffy, but this was oftentimes the case in the actual war, and it's nice that there was at least some variety thrown in there. I would've liked to have seen some secret perks like unlocking new planes or maybe a bonus campaign where you get to play as the Red Baron, but that aside, I would definitely chalk this up as an above-average game." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)



Winter Olympic Games: Lillehammer '94

Publisher: U.S. Gold.
Developer: Tiertex.
Game Type: Sports/Olympics, 1–4 players (alternating, 2-player simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

An officially licensed product of the 1994 Winter Olympic Games held in Lillehammer, Norway, *Winter Olympic Games* lets you enter ten different competitions. Skiing events include Downhill, Giant Slalom, Slalom, Super G (the longest of the slalom events), Ski Jump, and Freestyle Moguls (moguls are bumps of hard snow). You will also compete for medals in the Bobsleigh event, the Luge, Short Track Speed Skating, and the Biathlon, which is a combined sport of cross-country skiing and rifle shooting. You can train for the events, enter the Mini Olympics, or you can play the Full Olympics mode, which includes all ten events, plus Opening and Closing ceremonies.

Up to four players compete against one another, or against actual Olympic Game records. As in *Track & Field* rapid button-pressing is important, but there are also more nuanced controls, such as the timing of button presses and using the pad to steer in the Bobsleigh. Sixteen different countries are represented, and players can select from three difficulty levels (club, national, and Olympic) and eight languages. Thanks to Mode 7 graphics, the Luge and Bobsleigh events in the SNES cart have smoother scaling than those in the Genesis version. Also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear.

Notable Quotable:

"I got this game back in 1996 or so at a used game store. Regardless of what other people say about it, I believe that it's a great game. Most people who play it say that their fingers ache or that the events are messed up and make no sense or that the computer players are unbeatable. Those people just don't know how to play, though, and just need practice." – GameFaqs (gamefaqs.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Mediocre game at best . . . the level of difficulty makes the game less enjoyable . . . shoddy gameplay and average graphics . . . I highly recommend practicing the events before engaging in the actual competition . . . the gameplay left me frustrated with my inability to do anything when all the while the computer players did just fine . . . the music is not bad . . . During events, the sound effects are minimal, except for when you finish your event, which includes crowd cheers . . . or you fail, in which case you get booed. I got booed a lot." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

The Wizard of Oz

Publisher: SETA.
Developer: Manley and Associates.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Saddled by platforms that you can fall right through, characters who walk slowly and attack weakly, gameplay elements that have nothing to do with the movie, and poor level design that invites ridicule for being both too easy and too frustrating, *The Wizard of Oz* lacks even a modicum of the charm, intelligence, and overall excellence of Victor Fleming's 1939 feature film of the same name, or of L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

Dorothy (kicks and throws gems, bubbles, and stars), Cowardly Lion (slaps with his paws and throws gems), Scarecrow (throws gems and attacks with a pitchfork), and Tin Man (kicks, shoots gems, and attacks with an axe) are all playable characters (at one point or another), and even little Toto gets in on the action in some ill-advised, puzzle-based mini-games, but there is little enjoyment to be had here. Dorothy—who can fly for a short time by picking up winged slippers—is the most utilized character, but her kicking motion is less than effective against enemies, most of which attack from above. The Tin Man can neither duck nor jump, making him particularly ineffective. Each character has his or her own set of health and lives.

The action takes place in such locations as Shy Village, Gamboge Gorge, Maize Meadow, Saffron Fields, Xanthin Farms, Citron City, The Red Country, and Cinnabar City. Some of the areas will have you hopping on platforms to scale tall trees, buildings, and vines, and you will encounter moving platforms, including floating logs. You will want to collect bricks (for building bridges to levels) and tickets (for entering the Emerald City at the end) along the way.

Enemies and obstacles include birds, walking chairs, frogs, lemons dropping, cats, buzzards, buzz saws, clock hands, chattering teeth, clouds, and more, including such bosses as a giant crow wearing a vest and the Wicked Witch. There are more than thirty levels in all, including some areas based on the 1990 *Wizard of Oz* animated series. The game looks mediocre at best (to put it nicely), and there are four butchered versions of songs from the film. Sound effects are sparse. This is a nice *Wizard of Oz* collectible as long as you do not actually play it.

Notable Quotable:

"One of the worst games ever . . . everything imaginable wants you dead . . . there're even enemies you can barely see, like a tiny mouse on a fence in the background. Are you kidding me? That doesn't even make sense from a perspective viewpoint. She's standing in front of the fence! . . . The only thing effective is shooting at things, but your ammo runs out extremely quick, and it's very rare to find more . . . You fall through the platforms, no kidding. If you try to jump from an angle or land anywhere other than dead center, you're going through . . . It shouldn't have been made." – The Angry Video Game Nerd (cinemassacre.com)

Notable Quotable:

"The gameplay is what obliterates any potential charm the game might have borrowed from the film. *The Wizard of Oz* is simply a broken mess of a game . . . All four characters move at the same speed, which is to say they're all incredibly slow. This becomes a big issue when enemies start flooding the screen, with all of them moving much faster than you. Even the jumping feels slow and awkward . . . it's quite difficult, but for all of the wrong reasons. Not only are the controls and gameplay bad and plagued with glitches, the levels themselves also feel clunky . . . the game does provide a password system, but every password is needlessly long, and it's hard to even tell which letters you're highlighting. The game can't even make an on-screen keyboard intuitive." – Wizard Dojo (wizarddojo.com)

Wizardry V: Heart of the Maelstrom

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Game Studio Inc./ASCII Corporation.
Game Type: First-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

Once again floods, famine, and earthquakes ravage the land of Llylgamyn. Unfortunately, the great Orb of Llylgamyn—an artifact that has protected the city for ages—is now powerless to stop the scourge. To save the world and the people within, you and your party must plunge headfirst into the Heart of the Maelstrom.

Before exploration begins you enter the Training Grounds, where you commission characters to join your party. Options in the Training Grounds let you create new apprentice characters, inspect veteran characters, delete characters, change a character's name and class, and reorder your character class. You can select from five different races, each of varying strengths and weaknesses: Humans (average in all traits); Elves (intelligent, but not very strong, excellent spell-casters); Dwarfs (strong, hardy, love fine weapons and armor); Gnomes (agile); and Hobbits (agile, lucky).

You can also pick your characters' alignment, selecting between good, neutral, and evil. There are four basic character classes—Fighter, Mage, Cleric, and Thief—and four elite classes—Wizard, Samurai, Lord, and Ninja. Similar to the first three titles in the *Wizardry* series (*Wizardry IV* was quite a bit different), gameplay involves exploring a vast, labyrinthine dungeon with the party you create. You will battle monsters, stay at the inn to recover hit points, sell weapons and other equipment at Boltac's Trading Post, revive hurt characters at the Temple of Cant, search for hidden doors and items, go camping to guard against monsters, swim across magical pools, open treasure chests, and, as the manual recommends, map out your quest on graph paper so you know where you are and how you got there.

Battles are turn-based. When you encounter hostile creatures two windows will appear: one showing you the names and number of monsters you will battle, and one used to gather instructions and report on the progress of the battle. Once the fight begins, you will see a description of the combat and you and your opponent's actions. You will select from a variety of actions, including fight, parry, dispel (forces some monsters to return to the abyss), spell, use (item), run, hide, and ambush. There are sixty-three spells to cast, divided into Mage and Cleric categories. Each category is divided into seven levels; the most potent spells are at the higher levels.

Based on the 1988 computer game, *Wizardry V* was followed by an assortment of sequels and off-shoots, including *Nemesis: The Wizardry Adventure* (computers, Sega Saturn), *Wizardry: Summoner* (Game Boy Advance), and *Wizardry: Labyrinth of Lost Souls* (iPhone, PlayStation 3, PS Vita).

Fun Fact: *Wizardry: Proving Grounds of the Mad Overlord*—the first game in the series—debuted on home computers in 1981. It was developed by Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead.

Notable Quotable:

"This is for avid AD&D fans who get bored with pretty RPGs and who long for the days of endless campaigns in dark musty dungeons. You get solid adventure that leaves you screaming and tearing out your hair for days on end." – *Game Players* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"A faithful adaptation of the old computer adventure game. This is a very slow-paced RPG. There are plenty of options, but this cart is for gamers who like more deliberate strategy RPGs. This game is for fans of the genre." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (May 1994)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are substandard . . . Monsters literally pop up in the center of blank rooms, which are minimally drawn with a few straight lines. Also disappointing is the increased difficulty in routing the party through the encounters. Mapping is now a major challenge, as levels no longer fit neatly on a 20×20 grid map. But many of the new features add dimension to the playing experience. Pools may hide treasure, and can magically kill or cure; therefore, swimming ability has become a vital skill instead of just a helpful accessory. New spells and monsters have been added, and these enrich the gaming experience. For example, multiple groups can be in the dungeon simultaneously (even launching rescue parties). Combat is also livelier, because there are more options now, with long-range weapons and ambushes providing more firepower to the party. The biggest challenges are the noncombat encounters . . . Completing the game requires gaining items and information from these denizens, but brute force won't work. Players must use charm, bribery, or theft to get what they need, and the wrong approach can spell disaster . . . *Wizardry* is enough to keep you underground for a while, but despite all its improvements, it doesn't compare to state-of-the-art SNES RPGs like *Final Fantasy II*." – *GamePro* (June 1994)

Wolfchild

Publisher: Virgin Games.
Developer: Core Design.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

One day your father, the brilliant Kal Morrow, was happily working away in his lab, perfecting plans for the ultimate war machine: a being with the brains of a man and the instincts and strength of a wolf. But the evil Karl Draxx, head of international terrorist gang Chimera, foiled his plans by kidnapping him and killing his wife, who also happens to be your mom. This makes you, Saul Morrow, understandably angry, and you swear by all that is holy (and unholy) that you will exact vengeance on this terrible man and his gang.

Eagerly stepping into the Project Wolfchild transmutation booth, you are transformed from a mild-mannered oceanographer into a lycanthropic warrior equipped with incredible strength, psychic powers, and a mean left hook. As said beast, you will run, jump, punch, and shoot your way through five nicely illustrated stages of decent action: Wolf Ship (a giant battle cruiser filled with assault squads), Dense Jungle, Ancient Temple (an area riddled with traps), Chimera Base, and Inner Core.

While in human form you can only use your fists (which gets tedious and are relatively ineffective), but as the Wolfchild you can shoot unlimited fireblasts and grab the following power-ups: double fireblasts, arc blasts, flamers, homers (homing missiles), plasma balls, three-way bullets, and boomers (boomerangs). Enemies to battle include batmen, birdmen, cats, dogs, octopi, squid, and an assortment of hybrids, including reptiles that are part human.

The SNES game has more graphical detail and better sounds than the Genesis version. Originally created in 1992 for the Amiga and the Atari ST, *Wolfchild* was also released for the Game Gear and Sega CD, the latter version containing an animated introductory sequence.

Notable Quotable:

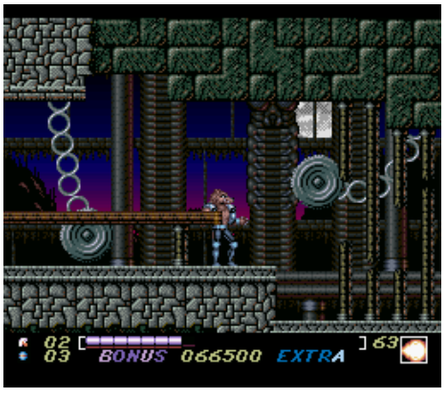
"This was a new idea, and the levels are huge, but the overall game is dull and rather unappealing." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (October 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics, for the time that the game was developed, were absolutely incredible. The sprites are beautifully detailed, including the waving of hair in harshly windy environments. Smooth parallax scrolling and other visual effects such as heavy rain give you the feeling that you're in a living environment. Even the boss characters have a colossal feel about them . . . Despite showing its age, the music is very well composed. The beats are on, and the synth-pop tunes make you want to snap your fingers . . . The A.I. is dull and almost lifeless. Each enemy is placed in a specific block, ever waiting for their target to come nearer so they may attack. Even when the main character has come into view, the enemies hardly attack with any sort of vigor, but instead attack lackadaisically, in easily decipherable patterns. The game definitely suffers in this regard, which is unfortunate considering the effort put into most other areas." – GameSpot (www.gamespot.com)

Notable Quotable:

"I was massively influenced by *Strider*, which I thought at the time was quite amazing. Yes, *Altered Beast* gave me the idea of taking a hero from human to a super-powered werewolf, but the thing that really inspired me, as crazy as it sounds, was a belt buckle. One of my colleagues at Core, Bob Churchill (who worked on such titles as *Chuck Rock*) was hugely into bands like The Cult during the late '80s/early '90s and often wore a belt with a buckle that had the word 'WOLFCHILD' in cut-out silver letters on it. To this day, I have no idea what it meant, but that 'title' just worked for me, so all those things came together to make the game. Other influences would be Capcom coin-op art of that era (hence the manga-like characters, which back then still hadn't become mainstream so they were cool and exotic), the graded metallic art of the Bitmap Brothers games, and from a story point of view, all those half-human-half-animal creatures draw from *The Island of Doctor Moreau* (hence the main characters' surname: Morrow)." – Simon Phipps (www.rvgfanatic.com), who designed and did graphics for *Wolfchild*.



Wolfenstein 3-D

Publisher: Imagineer.
Developer: id Software.
Game Type: First-Person Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

A watered down, more pixelated port of id Software's groundbreaking FPS classic *Wolfenstein 3D*, which came out in 1992, *Wolfenstein 3-D* (notice the subtle title difference) for the SNES puts you in the role of B. J. Blazkowicz, a "top Republic spy and terminal action seeker." Your job as a one-man army is to complete six multi-stage missions: Dresden Strike, A Dark Secret, Operation Eisenfaust, Trail of the Madman, Confrontation, and Staatmeister's Last Stand. As in the computer game, you walk (including strafing right and left) through labyrinthine castles, dungeons, a laboratory, and a mountain fortress, opening doorways to various rooms, riding elevators, and knifing and shooting guards, officers, and mutants.

Thanks to Nintendo's family friendly policies the Hitler character's mustache was removed and his name was changed to Staatmeister Meisterstaat. Swastikas and other WWII references were not included, enemy guards now speak English (mostly "Halt!" and "Stop!"), red blood was colored gray, giant mutated rats replaced dogs, and crosses were removed (even though games like *Castlevania* contain crosses, Nintendo is often squeamish about religious imagery).

As you work your way through the game you can find extra ammunition, keys for opening doors, food and first aid kits for replenishing your health, and four types of treasures: chests, chalices, crowns, and scepters. Each time you grab fifty treasures you gain an extra life. You are always equipped with a pistol and a knife, and you can add a machine gun and a chain gun to your arsenal. You can brandish two weapons not found in the computer game: a flamethrower and a rocket launcher.

Wolfenstein 3-D—a sequel to 1981's *Castle Wolfenstein*—was also ported to the Jaguar and Game Boy Advance. Followed by *Return to Castle Wolfenstein* (PS2, Xbox), *Wolfenstein* (PS3, Xbox), *Wolfenstein: The New Order* (PS3, PS4, Xbox 360, Xbox One), and *Wolfenstein II: The New Colossus* (PS4, Xbox One, Switch).

Fun Fact: The unlicensed religious game from Wisdom Tree called *Super Noah's Ark 3D* uses the *Wolfenstein 3-D* engine. You will find it listed in this book.

Notable Quotable:
"This Super NES version almost has everything in the sense of the gameplay . . . The rotation and scaling may not be good as the PC, but it's a good translation. Sound effects are okay." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"The music per stage is short and will drive you mad as the levels are so big . . . The sound effects are amazing . . . Everything looks the same, which can be very confusing, causing you to look at the (albeit impressive) map a lot. Bosses are huge and remorseless, and shots from anyone take huge chunks off your life gauge." – Arcade Attack (www.arcadeattack.co.uk)

Notable Quotable:
"The 30 levels are somewhat less detailed than the PC version's, with fewer decorations and smaller rooms, and only a small handful of them bear resemblance to levels from the PC version. Some playability changes were also made . . . It is now possible to circle strafe with the L and R buttons, which is impossible in the PC version since there are no separate Strafe Left and Strafe Right keys . . . there was an Automap added, which helps immensely for navigating the corridors since there are fewer landmarks to go by." – Hardcore Gaming 101 (hg101.kontek.net)

Insider Insight:
First-person shooters on the Super Nintendo were awful by today's standards, but *Wolfenstein 3-D* was a title that, although not nearly as gritty as the PC versions, scared the living crap out of me as a young kid. From the scary rats, to the soldiers screaming "Stop" and "Halt!", I just could not muster the intestinal fortitude to play it much. The music alone would make my hands tremble when I was surrounded, and I would just crumble like a cookie under the pressure. I was just a kid, and *Turtles in Time* or a sports game was where I got my kicks. Shooters just weren't my thing.

My father was calm and cool while inside Castle Wolfenstein, though. Screaming obscenities at the rabid rats and soldiers (not German Shepherds and Nazis like the PC version sadly, but still cool) in his way was ironically reassuring. My dad was not scared of anything, and although he would often die in the game and curse some more, his willingness to try and mow down enemies was admirable. I remember one time on the third room of the game, this massive Aryan soldier was chasing him, and he just stood there, backing up slowly and taking bullets, all the while firing his mini-gun at the baddie at the same time. We knew it was going to be a close call, but my dad ended up finishing the filthy bum off with just five percent health left. Although it was just a video game, it said a lot about his character—never flinching, but not smart enough to look for cover! – Patrick Hickey Jr.

Wolverine: Adamantium Rage

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Bits Corporation.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

You, as the mutant Wolverine, must uncover the mystery of your past. You have memories, but you believe some of them are implants. What's real? What's imagined? Who's behind it all? You receive a mysterious message on your computer directing you to the Weapon X laboratory, and it is off you go to find out the truth. You will work your way through an assortment of side-scrolling combat levels that are supplemented with platforming, teleport stations, and secret switches that activate hidden doorways.

After working your way through the labyrinthine secret laboratory, where you will battle guards, floating security droids, and ceiling-mounted machine guns, you will go through a ninja training camp and cyborg workshop to reach Lady Deathstrike, all the while battling ninja warriors and avoiding such obstacles as spike pits, poison-blowing pipes, and devices that can crush you. In Tokyo, you will track down Shinobi Shaw to the Inner Circle while dealing with helicopters, electrified neon signs, limpet mines, guards, soldiers, Geist, and Scream.

An hallucinogenic world of nightmares pits you against cold fires, crimson rivers, crystal sentinels, psychic winds, and Cyber trolls, while the headquarters of The Inner Circle finds you facing guards, floating androids, The Black Queen, and a vast labyrinth of rooms, hallways, tubes, and platforms. Finally, as you are about to defeat Fugue, you are plunged into a mysterious underworld, where you will face The Hand and their leader. Other underworld enemies and obstacles include ninjas, hounds, sulfur rivers, and falling stalactites.

Your mission is dangerous, but fortunately you have numerous skills, such as the ability to jump (including super jump and attach to ceiling), punch (including a running punch), sprint, crouch (including a crouch and slash), deliver a side kick, throw a backhand, do a front kick, attach to walls, execute a forward dive, punch and slash with claws, slash at the floor, and throw a claw uppercut. You can experiment with these moves to pull off combos. In addition, you can grab health and invincibility pick-ups, many of which are hidden.

In the bottom left corner of the screen it shows you how many foes are remaining to defeat before you can move on to the next level. Also of note is Elsie Dee, an android who constantly pursues you throughout the game. When she gets close, a meter appears at the top center of the screen. You can escape her by reaching the next check point before she catches up to you. *Wolverine: Adamantium Rage*, which is much different than the Sega Genesis game of the same name, features three difficulty levels: normal, dangerous, and furious.

Notable Quotable:
"Everyone's favorite X-Man fares pretty well on the Super NES. Wolverine has plenty of moves and lots of technique, and fans of the comic character will definitely want to check this one out. But in the end, it's routine action." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:
"Both versions of *Adamantium Rage* have a time limit, but the Sega Genesis version is way stricter than the SNES version . . . The two games suffer from incredibly stiff and unintuitive controls . . . Jumping and platforming is a lot more difficult in the Sega Genesis version . . . Levels in the SNES version are maze-like environments where the goal is to kill an arbitrary number of enemies on screen before it will let you proceed . . . The Sega Genesis version is a more linear affair where you have to make it to the end of a level by platforming, combat, and switch throwing." – Blair Farrell (comicgamersassemble.com)

Wolverine: Adamantium Rage

Insider Insight: Just within the past couple years I have realized something about *Wolverine: Adamantium Rage* that I never knew before: it is entirely different than the Sega Genesis version released at the same time. Same cover. Shared advertisements. There was absolutely nothing to indicate these were different games. Even the back of box text is identical, save for one phrase: While SNES Wolverine "battles his way from the Weapon X lab to the streets of Tokyo," Genesis Wolverine "battles his way from the Weapon X lab to the sewers of New York City"—so the SNES version is a little less smelly, if nothing else.

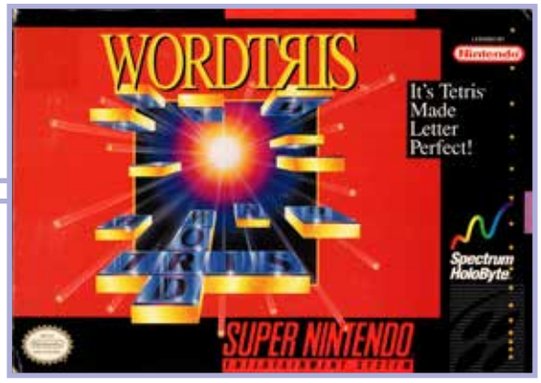
So yeah, both stories start from Weapon X, with Wolvie trying to find clues to his past. But from there it is totally different, with the SNES version turning Wolverine into a gullible idiot, blindly following trails because a supervillain tells him "go there." Meanwhile, the Genesis version basically frames Logan as more of a sheer jerk, knowing his path and constantly refusing help from fellow X-Men. Not much better. And neither has any real sense of resolution at the end: just congratulatory words from Xavier and friends.

One thing both games nail: Representing 1990s Wolverine comics in one cohesive product. If Wolvie should ever find himself starring in games again, he might face off against Lady Deathstrike or Selene . . . maybe Cyber, Shinobi Shaw, or Bloodscream. But Tri-Fusion? The Destroyer Program? Geist? Fugue? So '90s! And sooooo never to be seen again anywhere else. (Genesis has its own C-listers with Albert, Elsie-Dee, and Lurker, but unlike SNES, it did get Sabretooth!)

Oddly, both were also published by different divisions of the same company—Genesis was Acclaim, while SNES was infamous LJN. And unlike *Spider-Man/Venom: Maximum Carnage*—a much better game published by LJN—those initials unfortunately do apply for *Adamantium Rage*: "Let's Just Not." – Chris Baker

Wordtris

Publisher: Spectrum HoloByte.
Developer: Sphere/Realtime Associates.
Game Type: Action Puzzle/Word Puzzle, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.



One of countless games inspired by *Tetris*, *Wordtris* combines the falling block action of *Tetris* with the strategic word play of a board game like *Boggle* or *Scrabble*. Each tile that descends from the top of the playfield is labeled with a letter. The way to rid the screen of rapidly accumulating letters is to maneuver them in such a way that they form words horizontally or vertically that are at least three letters in length (multiple words can overlap each other). In the more difficult skill levels words must be at least four letters long and the tiles fall faster.

Along with properly spelled words, tools used to remove tiles from the screen include randomly falling cherry bombs, dynamite sticks, and acid beakers. These helpful explosives are always a welcome sight when you see them falling from the top of the playfield. Also good are wild card blocks, where you can toggle through the alphabet to select your letter of choice. To win a round, you have to spell out the Magic Word. *Wordtris* features a pair of shared playfield two-player modes (Cooperative and Competitive), plus a Tournament mode that allows up to four people to play at once. The action is clumsy compared to such pure falling-block puzzlers as *Tetris*, *Klax*, or *Columns*, but it is still fairly enjoyable.

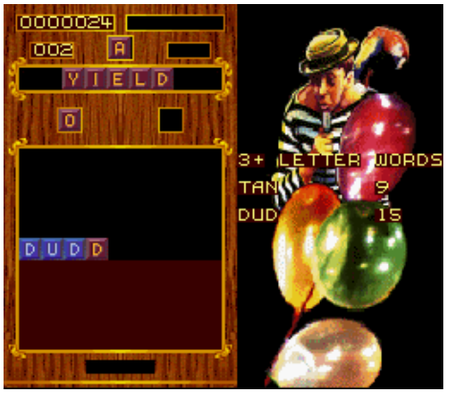
Adapted from the 1991 computer game, *Wordtris* for the SNES features a circus theme (complete with calliope music and colorful imagery) not present in the original version. The Game Boy port also lacks the circus theme.

Notable Quotable:

"*Wordtris* uses *Tetris*-style gameplay in an interesting manner, but unfortunately each round's outcome relies more on tile selection than actual skill . . . Like the original *Tetris*, in which gamers found themselves begging for a 'straight piece,' those playing *Wordtris* will quickly find themselves pleading at the screen for a vowel . . . There are only so many words a person can make with the letters FFFFFFFZXXXXV . . . Despite that, the game is quite fun to play (especially to *Scrabble* fans)." – Rob O'Hara (Summer 2006, *Video Game Collector* #6).

Notable Quotable:

"It's easy to become mesmerized while forming the blocks into words when you first play the game . . . There's only one small problem: eventually the tiles will move so fast that you aren't thinking of words, you're just trying to fit them in somewhere on the screen. You are then no longer using your brain to plan out specific words or combinations; everything happens out of blind luck. Once words you didn't even know were part of the English language (ell is a word?) start disappearing, the game loses all sense of fun . . . Another problem is that the wild card block, a tile that is supposed be helpful (by allowing you to choose any letter you want), is almost useless since you have to rapidly tap the button to scroll through the alphabet. On the PC version all you had to do was hit the corresponding letter on the keyboard. Now it's too easy to speed past the one you're looking for as you frantically pound the button before the tile lands . . . Don't expect the game to redeem itself in the multiplayer mode, either. It isn't very exciting. Players can choose to take on a friend for either a competitive game or cooperative play, although you'll share the same screen no matter which setting you choose. Tiles now come in two different colors as players race to form words to increase their scores . . . All things considered, *Wordtris* is far from a bad game, but it just doesn't capture the fun or skill of either *Tetris* or *Scrabble*." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at www.allgame.com)



World Cup USA 94

Publisher: U.S. Gold.
Developer: Tiertex Design Studios.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

A fast-paced soccer title with small players, *World Cup USA 94* features all of 1994's qualifying twenty-four teams (plus eight teams that did not qualify), VCR-style instant replays, a tilted overhead view of a scrolling vertical field, and a radar screen that shows where all the players are on the field at all times, which helps you aim passes. Advanced Mode allows for personalized strategy, custom formations, custom teams, a special play editor, and an "exclusive ball trap option for precise control." Conversely, there is an Easy Play Mode that simplifies things for beginners.

Official licensing gives game usage of Striker, the dog mascot of the 1994 World Cup. Striker is certainly cartoon-like and cute, but he is used as an icon in the text-starved selection screens, meaning you will have to refer to the manual to tell what each Striker stance means (an annoyance to be sure). Battery backup lets you save custom formations and custom teams, as well as tournament progress. The hectic, hyperactive gameplay is frequently frustrating (the computer is really good at stealing the ball), robbing the game of any subtlety and players of any strategic planning. Soccer fans should stick with the superior *FIFA* series.

World Cup USA 94 was also released for the Genesis and Game Gear. The Sega CD version features such extras as a World Cup Trivia Quiz, fly-bys of various soccer stadiums, and two music tracks by the classic rock band, the Scorpions: special World Cup versions of "No Pain No Gain" and "Under the Same Sun."

Notable Quotable:
"By no means a bad game—It's all there, and you can set it up just how you want, but it should have more solid gameplay and real international player's names." – *Total!!* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"If you love soccer strategy and don't mind the too-cute mascot and the cartoony graphics, you'll really run with the detailed options in *World Cup USA 94*. If you're not a soccer fan, though, the unrealistic graphics will probably trip you up." – *GamePro* (July 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Of the recent slew of soccer games released to coincide with the World Cup, this one is tops. Not only does it feature the 24 teams that qualified for Cup play, you can actually hear the crowd singing. The real kicker: You can customize the action so that it's easier for little kids to run, shoot, and score." – *Entertainment Weekly* (June 1994)

World Heroes

Publisher: Sunsoft.
Developer: Sunsoft.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A scientist has created a time machine to bring together eight of the world's greatest fighters (each loosely based on celebrities and figures from world history) so they can duke it out in a series of one-on-one battles. Each character can duck, jump, throw, and do weak and strong kicks and punches. Each also has *Street Fighter II* influenced special moves.

Fighters include: Hanzo, a Japanese Iga ninja (spinning shuriken, rising dragon wave, flying pinwheel); Fuuma, a Japanese Fuuma ninja (same as Hanzo); Janne (think Joan of Arc), a French fencer (fire bird, flash sword, sword pogo); J. Carn, a Mongolian fighter (shoulder ram, napalm punch); Muscle Power, a Hulk Hogan-like American wrestler (muscle charge, tornado back breaker); Brocken, a German soldier (missile launcher, hurricane arm, electric shock, flying thrust); Rasputin, a Russian magician (fire ball, spinning robe attack); and Dragon, a Bruce Lee-like Chinese martial artist (fists of fury, flaming dragon kick).

You can challenge the computer or a friend to Normal Mode, where you travel to opponents' countries to battle on their turf; and Fatal Match Mode, where you fight in enclosed arenas featuring such harmful hazards as mines, flaming ropes, spiked walls, and oil slicks. The objective is to reduce your opponent's life gauge to empty in each timed, best two-out-of-three battle. Based on the 1992 Alpha Denshi arcade/Neo Geo game, *World Heroes* was also released for the Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"I've always found the SNES port of *World Heroes* to be underrated and faithful. Easy-to-pull-off combos, vibrant visuals, and those oh-so-vicious death matches make this a winner in my book. Besides, where else can you knock someone into burning ropes?" – RVGFanatic (rvgfanatic.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Each [character] is a virtual carbon copy of someone on the *Street Fighter* roster . . . The SNES version is, simply put, terrible. While it mimics the looks of the MVS unit pretty well, it's missing some of the voice samples as well as some background detail . . . the biggest flaw is the game's lethargic pace . . . Sadly, the Genesis version is even worse than the SNES game when it comes to production values." – Retro Game Age (www.retrogameage.com)

Insider Insight:

The year was 1997. I had just moved to a new town in Central Washington. Everyone there was different from the people in the small, weird town in Idaho where I had previously lived. I spoke slowly, they spoke quickly. I had a dry sense of humor and thick sarcasm. They didn't understand me, and I was pretty confused by them. In Idaho, I had been part of a computer and video game club. We would meet up and work on computers while discussing video games. My new school was so bad at computers that I gave myself admin privileges to fix the networks. This new culture and lack of things to talk about was difficult.

One of the things my brother and I did back in Idaho was rent fighting games, and we would duke it out while talking about various subjects. The problem was, I had gotten tired of *Street Fighter II* and *Mortal Kombat*, and I needed something different. In the grocery store near our new house we found a cool game called *World Heroes*, so we rented it. I knew it from some reviews in *EGM* and *GamePro*, so it seemed like a fun game. Also the characters looked pretty cool.

Fortunately I was right, and it was exactly what I needed for a couple days' respite. Some of the characters were very similar in style and even looks to those in *Street Fighter II*, but the game added some cool ideas. Some of the levels would damage you if you stood in specific spots. And Hulk Hogan was a character. Rasputin showed up, and a crazy witch doctor as well. They also made versions of Joan of Arc and Bruce Lee.

The game was so similar to *Street Fighter II* that even today I forget that the move set for the characters is not interchangeable. But it was fun, and my brother and I beat each other up while waiting for things to be figured out, like if my Dad's new job in Washington would actually stick (it did). I enjoyed the game so much that I continued to rent it when I could. I found a used copy for sale once and saved up my money to buy it. Unfortunately someone beat me to it. – Keith Haus

World Heroes 2

Publisher: Takara.
Developer: Takara.
Game Type: Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

World Heroes 2 features all eight playable fighters from the original game, plus six more with unique moves: Shura, a Thai kickboxer (flying knee kick, airborne twirl kick); Erik, a Norwegian Viking (hammer of Thor, Aegyr's halberd, blizzard breath); Mudman, a New Guinean environmental warrior with a weaponized mask (mudcutter, mud gyro, mudman attack); J. Maximum, an American quarterback (pigskin thunder shot, penetration punt, shoulder bunt crunch); Ryoko, a Japanese judo master (bosatsu-sho hands of energy, airborne body bounce, super shoulder throw); and Captain Kidd, a Seven Seas pirate captain (shark knuckles, shark uppercut, whirlpool kick, pirate ship blast).

Other characters include Neo Geeguse (metamorphisizer attack that lets him randomly turn into the other heroes), who fought the winner of the first *Word Heroes*; and Dio (atomic claw, rolling smash, eraser claw, sonic hook/sonic uppercut), who wants to destroy all the other fighters to become number one. The format of the game is similar to its progenitor (complete with a mode that includes such hazards as lightning bolts, spikes, and saw blades), but fighters can now deflect projectiles back at opponents, initiate reversals, and opt for a "seesaw" life gauge where, when you damage your enemy, your strength level goes up while your opponent's goes down.

Based on the 1993 ADK arcade/Neo Geo game. Followed by such sequels and off-shoots as *World Heroes Jet* (arcade/Neo Geo, GB), *World Heroes Perfect* (arcade/Neo Geo, Neo Geo CD), and *World Heroes Anthology* (PS2), which includes faithful arcade ports of *World Heroes*, *World Heroes 2*, *World Heroes Jet*, and *World Heroes Perfect*.

Notable Quotable:

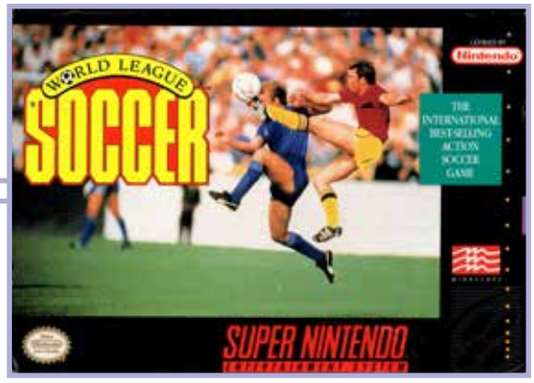
"No loss of quality to speak of in its arcade translation . . . the characters look great, and their movements are smooth and very responsive." – *Game Players* (August 1994)

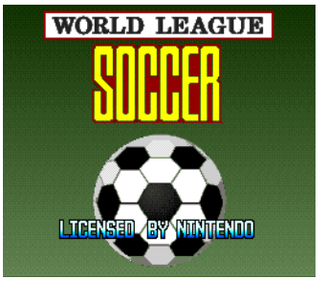
Notable Quotable:

"The Neo Geo madness continues with another excellent conversion of an arcade game to the Super NES platform. One advantage of this version is the ability to play as the boss characters (especially Neo Geeguse, who can morph into any fighter). The speed setting is also a plus (the top speed setting is pretty fast), and the tug-of-war Survival Matches (with various hazards in their stages) have been retained from the arcade. Some moves could have used a bit more animation (like Hanzo and Fuuma's uppercuts). Overall, it's a faithful translation." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (August 1994)

World League Soccer

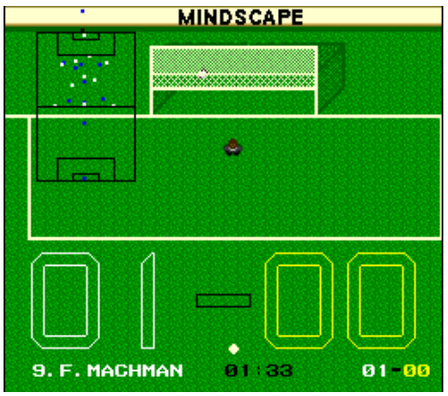
Publisher: Mindscape.
Developer: Anco Software.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.





Sporting a top-down perspective similar to *World Championship Soccer* for the Genesis, *World League Soccer* features five modes of play: Practice, Single Game, The League, The Match, and World Match. There are twenty-four international teams from which to choose, including Egypt, Italy, Japan, Russia, Scotland, and the United States. Wind conditions and four different field pitches (including plastic and wet) give the action some variety, and the players—who are fictional—can pull off a number of moves, including back-heels, overhead kicks, and long-range through-ball passes. There are also corner kicks, free-kicks, throw-ins, and sudden death shoot-outs.

The players and ball are small, the action moves fast, and the vertical field is huge, scrolling in all directions. A small radar at the top/left of the screen provides a bird's-eye view of the entire field and all the players. The game, which lets you pick players and substitutes, was ported from *Kick Off 2*, the popular 1990s Amiga computer title. Known in Japan as *Pro Soccer*.



Notable Quotable:

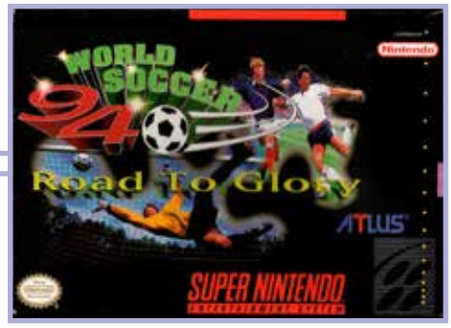
"The game is less than enjoyable and gets extremely boring. The terrible top view creates horrible graphics, the music is annoying, and the controls are just as bad." – *The Good, the Bad, and the Bogus: Nathan Lockard's Complete Guide to Video Games* (1995, Adventure Press)

Notable Quotable:

"*Pro Soccer* [*World League Soccer*] is a sad sham of a game. The big downfall is the unconvincing collision detection and dodgy control method. At certain points during the game, the ball actually passed through my player, and at others, the ball 'spanged' off in the opposite direction to the one in which it should have gone! Needless to say, this made passing and shooting a real hit-or-miss affair, and resulted in me getting bored very quickly . . . the sprites are flickery and the scrolling is jerky . . . The sound is also dire. An appallingly inept 'tune' plays throughout the game and does nothing but annoy." – Mean Machines (www.meanmachinesmag.co.uk)

World Soccer 94: Road to Glory

Publisher: Atlus Software.
Developer: Rage Software.
Game Type: Sports/Soccer, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



Known as *Striker* in Europe, *Eric Cantona Football Challenge* in France, and *World Soccer* in Japan, *World Soccer 94: Road to Glory* features a tilted overhead view of a scrolling, vertical playfield. Gamers select from sixty-four international teams, each with different strengths and weaknesses, and each comprised of fictional players. Gamers can select from five modes of play: Practice (penalty kick and ball control); Friendly Game (against the computer or a friend); Super Cup (World Cup-style tournament); World Knockout (elimination tournament); World League (round robin with 2 to 16 teams); and Indoor Soccer (only five players and a goalie on each team—field is surrounded by a wall).

The action moves quickly, the players are large, and you can execute short and long passes, throw-ins, diving headers, sliding tackles, and other dynamic actions. You can also change formations, change strategies (normal, breakaway, cautious, defensive, open play, and attack), and select from such options as match length, extra time, shoot-outs on or off, wind strength, and pitch surface (hard, dry, good, wet, or soggy). Followed by *Elite Soccer*.

Notable Quotable:
"At last. The Super NES gets a footy game it deserves. It's playable, as realistic as you could want without sacrificing game-play, and stunningly addictive." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"*World Soccer* has its flaws, but overall it's as fun as any soccer cart around. If you can overlook the graphics and learn to handle the speed, you'll want to get on this Road to Glory." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Insider Insight:
My family loved soccer, even indoor soccer. I collected MISL (Major Indoor Soccer League) cards and went to any match I could. Do you remember Branko Šegota? He was amazing. A love of football set the stage for *World Soccer 94: Road to Glory*, and it did not let me down.

Spring Lake in Clearwater, Florida, seemed to be world famous in the '90s. Nearly every kid's party was at my house to play SNES games. In between rounds of *Super Mario Kart*, *Tecmo Super Bowl*, and *Tecmo Super NBA Basketball* we would fire up *World Soccer 94*.

World Soccer 94's redeeming feature was indoor soccer. While gameplay and strategy were lacking in the outdoor game, indoor was created perfectly. When we first got the game, we spent the whole weekend editing the player names so the teams would be comprised of indoor players and World Cup stars. My personal go-to was England—Andy Chapman was my guy!

After hours of editing player names and team kits it began. The best mode for our group was Knockout, which was sixty-four teams in a single elimination bracket. You did not want to lose early because these events would last hours; hours of inevitable ridicule because you lost to computer-controlled Qatar.

Indoor mode is very fast paced. The field is short and the timing for one-timers is essential. A common strategy is to run the flanks and cross the ball either off the walls above the goal or take a shot at the upper corners. If you took the shot, you would either score a ridiculous goal, the keeper would create a long deflection, or it would hit the crossbar for a short bounce. All three outcomes were ideal for the offense, as each created a great goal-scoring opportunity. The best defensive strategy is to mash the slide tackle button. The animation for sliding is faster than running. If you were ever caught behind a run you would mash the button to quickly catch up.

Men were separated from boys by their ability to pull off the diving header. If you could cross the ball off the wall and finish off with a diving header, you were most certainly going to get tackled by all your friends as if you won the World Cup. The timing is ridiculously hard, but the animation is worth it. The sense of pride is even better.

It is hard for me to choose my best accomplishment in life. I would say marrying a hot babe, creating two amazing boys, and crushing my opponent's soul with continuous diving headers in *World Soccer 94* are all up there. Not to brag, but I have a lot of paper trophies in a box somewhere signifying my *World Soccer 94* dominance. For a few short years I was the king of Spring Lake. – Dave Murray

WWF Raw

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Wrestling, 1–4 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

The follow-up to *WWF Royal Rumble*, *WWF Raw* improves upon the formula with four-player simultaneous action, faster gameplay, and wrestlers that are graded (1–10) according to four different attributes: speed, strength, weight, and stamina. There are twelve wrestlers you can control, each with his own signature moves and a special move: Brett "Hit Man" Hart (sharpshooter), Razor Ramon (Razor's edge), Luna Vachon (Luna eclipse), Lex Luger (running forearm), 1-2-3 Kid (moonsault), Doink (whoopee cushion), Diesel (jackknife), Shawn Michaels (slingshot suplex), Owen Hart (sharpshooter), Yokozuna (bonzai drop), Bam Bam Bigelow (headbutt off the top rope), and The Undertaker (tombstone piledriver).

Each wrestler has his own theme music and over-the-top mega moves, such as Owen Hart's whirling dirvish or Diesel's caber toss. In addition, each wrestler can punch, kick, stomp, trap, climb turnbuckles, perform clotheslines and sleeper holds, do dropkicks and kneedrops, knock out the ref, and more. When the ref is unconscious, or when the action moves outside the ring, you can do illegal moves, such as eye gouges and chokeholds, and smashing your opponent's skull with a chair or bucket.

Modes of play include One-on-One (wear your opponent down so you can pin him), Brawl (no referee), Tournament, Tag Team, Survivor Series (four-on-four), Royal Rumble, Match, Rematch, Bedlam (fight two wrestlers at once), and Raw Endurance (six one-on-one opponents consecutively). There are ten different difficulty levels, and there are digital photos of each wrestler. The action is viewed from the side and scrolls a little to show the entire playfield. Multi-tap adapter compatible. The Sega 32X version has slightly upgraded graphics and sounds. Also released for the Game Boy, Game Gear, and Genesis.

Notable Quotable:

"Whether you're hitting your opponent with a chair or using The Undertaker's tombstone piledriver on some poor chump, you'll agree that if you're into wrestling, you're gonna have to get *Raw*." – *GamePro* (February 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"Gameplay is largely unchanged from *Royal Rumble*. It's still a button masher, but at least this time there's a little bit of variety in the move sets. Some guys do back body drops instead of hip tosses, big boots to the face instead of clotheslines, and some guys even do screwdrivers instead of vertical suplexes . . . Presentation here is improved a bit from *Rumble*. The game's intro does a fairly decent job of recreating the original *Monday Night Raw* intro . . . the wrestler select screen has a weird VCR motif, where cycling through your choices rewinds and fast-forwards, and the pictures of each wrestler do a good job of making them look heroic or evil . . . There is a LOT of grunting . . . You'll either have to learn to tune it out or play with the game on mute." – Just Games Retro (justgamesretro.com)

WWF Raw

Insider Insight:
I like to think of the 1990s as society's wake up from the horrible fashion and hair experiments of the 1980s. But a few elements slipped in, including metal music and wrestling. Of course, being a teenager in the '90s meant I didn't really understand that—I thought wrestlers were cool and manly. Shawn Michaels was "the heartbreak kid," therefore a good-looking sex symbol. I thought Luna Vachon—the first female wrestler to appear in a WWF video game—was sexy (in-game sprites did leave much to the imagination, after all). The first thing that strikes me when I look back on *WWF Raw* now—the mullets—is how these guys did not get the memo that the 1980s were over. Kinda like James Hetfield of Metallica.

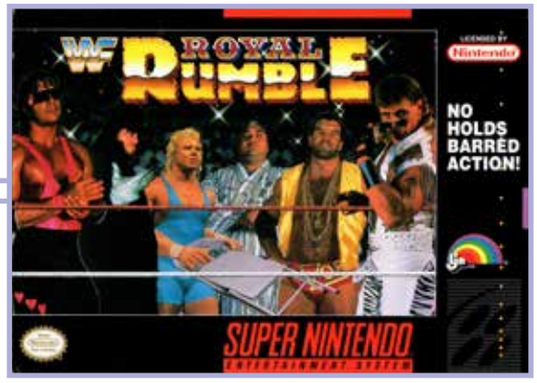
Life as a teenager in the '90s for me revolved around lifelong interests—video games, *Dungeons & Dragons*, reading—and more recent ones, including wrestling. My brother, cousin, and friends ordered the pay-per-view WWF events. We even had our own backyard league: I was the Undertaker derivative, with Magus' theme from *Chrono Trigger* as my intro. Playing *WWF Raw* gave us a chance to study, practice, and rehearse the dramatics and choreographies of fights. The game had a simple functioning layer—mash the buttons to win the tug-of-war—but we progressively discovered all the extras around that: execute maneuvers, be a devious cheat and knock out the referee, go for eye gouges, grab a chair or bucket outside the ring, etc. *Raw* is war!

We spent many evenings and weekend days with Shawn Michaels and Diesel having top billing. We loved to pick on our hated CPU-controlled wrestlers—especially Doink the Clown. Over the months we ended up breaking a controller or two, and we replaced them with turbo controllers. For a while we played with them, but the turbo made everything a question of approaching and timing: starting the grapple meant winning it. The game fell flat on its head, and there was little point to it. So we resolved to forego technology improvement and go back to the basics—get back to the *Raw* experience of a physical contest.

And here was a design lesson: unlike games like *Contra*, where mashing the button felt like a stupid constraint meant to tire us out, *WWF Raw* had us living the physical exertion of pulling through the match. It was the point: mashing with a meaning . . . except when we picked on CPU-controlled Doink. Turbo controllers provided great comic relief for beating up helpless clowns. – Dominic Arsenault

WWF Royal Rumble

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Wrestling, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.



This sequel to *WWF Super WrestleMania* features twelve playable pro wrestlers, each with his own special move: Bret "Hit Man" Hart (sharpshooter), Razor Ramon (Razor's edge), "Macho Man" Randy Savage (flying elbow smash), Shawn Michaels (back suplex), The Undertaker (tombstone piledriver), Tanaka (reverse fallaway slam), Mr. Perfect (perfect-plex suplex), Crush (cranium crunch), Ric Flair (figure-four leglock), Yokozuna (banzai drop), Ted DiBiase (million dollar dream), and Lex Luger (running shoulder butt).

The action is "no-holds-barred," meaning players can execute vicious choke holds, awful eye gouges, and back-breaking chairslams—leaving the ring and throwing wrestlers out of the ring are allowed. Naturally, there are also plenty of standard moves, such as punches, kicks, stomps, grapples (which are essentially button-mashing contests), dropkicks, clotheslines, atomic drops, suplexes, flying elbow drops, and more.

Modes of play include One-on-One (wear your opponent down so you can pin him); Brawl (no referee, meaning illegal moves are allowable); Tournament (beat the other eleven computer-controlled wrestlers); Tag Team; and Royal Rumble (up to six wrestlers enter the ring at once). There are ten different difficulty levels, and there are digital photos of each wrestler. The Genesis version of *WWF Royal Rumble* includes Hulk Hogan, Rick Martel, Jim Dugan, Irwin R. Shyster, and Papa Shango, but leaves out Mr. Perfect, Ted DiBiase, Yokozuna, Ric Flair, and Tanaka. Also released for the Dreamcast.

Notable Quotable:
"*Royal Rumble* is the finest arcade-style pro wrestling simulation ever released in any electronic format—surpassing even the excellent coin-op, *Superstars of Wrestling*." – *Electronic Games* (July 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Big improvement on the first game, but becomes dull if you're playing against the computer." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (July 1993)

Notable Quotable:
"Frantically pounding a button just to win a grapple is not my idea of fun . . . The wrestlers look close to their real-life counterparts, although they all have the same weight and height. Yokozuna looks too thin! A nice touch is the animated fans in the seats surrounding the ring. The sound is well done . . . Voice samples would have been a nice addition . . . There are a lot of play modes to keep fans busy, but there is no save feature to keep track of records or tournament progress . . . While *WWF Royal Rumble* isn't quite as exciting as a Pay-Per-View event, it offers enough enjoyment to satisfy hardcore fans." – all PC game (www.allpcgame.net)

WWF Royal Rumble

Insider Insight:
Not only was I a huge Nintendo fan, but also a huge wrestling fan at the time, and as great as the NES was, there were no good licensed pro wrestling games on the system. I had wanted an SNES since launch, but my parents would not hear of it, even though I'd saved the money to buy one myself. They made me put it in the bank and stick with an 8-bit world.

One day, I saw an ad for *WWF Royal Rumble* on the back of a video game magazine I was looking through in a grocery store. Amazed with the graphics and the roster, I knew I had to have it. Obtaining it gives me mixed emotions today. Since my parents wouldn't let me buy an SNES I traded off my NES collection to get there, specifically so I could own and play this game that I hoped would be the first WWF game on a console that I would truly enjoy.

It did not disappoint. I deeply enjoyed being able to play a Royal Rumble match at home, even with a roster that didn't provide anywhere near thirty superstars. Little touches like knocking out the referee and using a steel chair might be taken for granted today, but at the time it was groundbreaking.

Tom, my childhood best friend, would come over for afternoons on the game, where we would either team up against the computer or try to win the Royal Rumble. One day, our *Rumble* session was interrupted by my grandma calling. During the call Tom had to go home. When I went back to my room, I found that he had eliminated me to win the Rumble match while I was talking to Grandma. We both had a good laugh about that one for years. – Patrick Scott Patterson

Insider Insight:
What is there to say about early WWF games? They weren't, what's the word . . . good. That was a huge bummer for fans like me, who desperately wanted a solid grappler to play in between airings of the real thing on TV.

While the NES entries were terrible-to-middling, the SNES era changed all that with *WWF Super Wrestlemania*. It wasn't perfect, but it gave fans the basics and delivered with great graphics and details. One thing it did not offer, though, were the more gimmicky matches, and that is where *Royal Rumble* came in.

I clearly remember getting *Royal Rumble* in summer '93, and it made a relatively permanent home in my SNES cartridge slot for months thereafter. Struggling with the grapple system to pull off moves might have been a chore, but it was a fun chore.

It did not just have the headlining match, though, as it offered singles, tag team, and triple tag scraps, as well, each with multiple modifiers that you could apply to shake things up. It even had steel chairs and illegal moves, though you had to knock the ref out to use them. No, really, you'd have to KO the referee. That is something that even modern WWE games don't have.

Since then wrestling games have gotten light years better (shout out to AKI's N64 titles). Even so, *Royal Rumble* will always have a special place in my WWF-loving heart. The golden age of wrestling had finally received a fitting video game adaptation, and in the early '90s, that was about as awesome as you could get. – Jason Micciche

WWF Super WrestleMania

Publisher: LJN.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Wrestling, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1992.

The follow-up to *WWF WrestleMania* (NES) and the precursor to *WWF Royal Rumble* and *WWF Raw*, *WWF Super WrestleMania* lets players select from ten World Wrestling Federation stars: Hulk Hogan, "Macho Man" Randy Savage, The Undertaker, Jake "The Snake" Roberts, Hawk, Earthquake, Typhoon, Animal, Sid Justice, and Ted DiBiase.

Each wrestler can run, roll, throw their opponent out of the ring, push their opponent into the ropes, climb the turnbuckles, and pull off such moves as punch, kick, aerial attack, clothesline, powerslam, headbutt, suplex, bodyslam, hiptoss, flying dropkick, and stomp. Modes of play include One-on-One, Tag Team (two-on-two), and Survivor Series (four-on-four). The computer selects your opponents. In one-player games you can select from three difficulty levels: easy, medium, and hard.

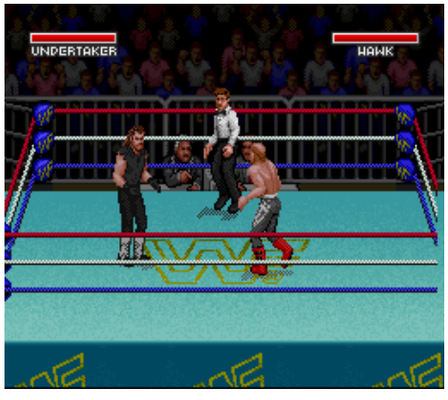
The view of the game is from the side, with the screen scrolling left and right a little to show the entire ring. The graphically inferior (though still nice-looking) Genesis version of the game, which adds a tournament-style WWF Championship mode, features a different mix of eight pro wrestlers (each with his own special move): Ultimate Warrior, Hulk Hogan, Ted Dibiase, Shawn Michaels, Randy Savage, Irwin R. Schyster, British Bulldog, and Papa Shango.

Notable Quotable:

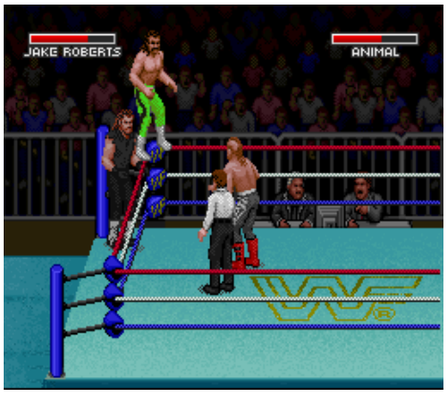
"This is certainly one of those titles you had a blast with if you were a kid back when it was released. Going back isn't the pleasant experience it once was. Even back then, the two sequels, *Royal Rumble* and *RAW*, easily made this game obsolete within a year or so of its release. This is one game where the memories are far better than the actual game." – Matt Paprocki (www.digitpress.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are excellent, with groovy digitized pictures of the WWF heroes and superb animation throughout—you can really recognize the wrestlers from the sprites. Sound-wise, this is a treat; there are tons of guitar twanging intro screens, and the sampled grunts and snorts as the wrestlers fight are totally brill. Best of all, though, is the two-player mode: fighting a mate is a laugh riot which will cause no end of arguments when you throw your pal out of the ring and jump on his head from the corner post!" – *Computer and Video Games* (April 1992)



WWF Super WrestleMania



Insider Insight:
WWF Super WrestleMania was one of the first "party games" of the 16-bit era. I remember playing this gem with friends during a birthday party sleepover as we dropkicked, suplexed, and hip-tossed each other for hours. It was released early in the console's lifecycle and was a huge step up from its NES predecessors in terms of graphics and sound. It was an amazing feeling to control Hulk Hogan or the Undertaker as I body-slammed my buddies (or took a few hits of my own).

What I remember most about the game was its simplicity. The core mechanics of the game were to move your wrestler close to your opponent so that you could "lock up" and tie arms. Then it became a button-mashing contest, with whomever mashed fastest being the winner, and thus executing the awesome wrestling move that followed.

In hindsight, this gameplay was very simple for what wrestling could be on a system like the SNES. It was mostly a button-masher with some fun characters and sound. Later versions in the franchise would add more content and signature moves for each character, moving it closer to fully fledged fighting games and adding a lot more replay value for the WWF gamer. – Matt Raithel

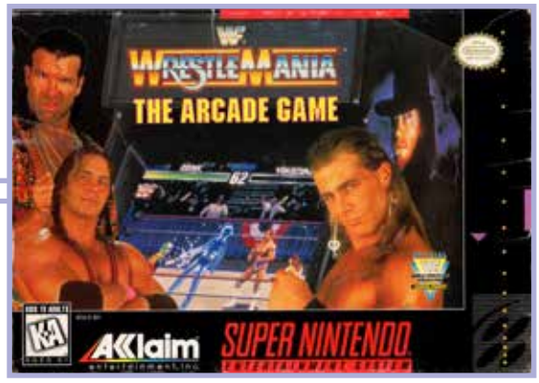
Insider Insight:
My earliest memory of the SNES is playing on my next-door neighbor's console shortly after it was launched in the UK in 1992. He had bought two games alongside the console: *SuperTennis* (Martin was a very good amateur tennis player) and *WWF SuperWrestleMania*. Both of us were huge wrestling fans at the time, as were our younger brothers, so I remember pestering him to buy this as much as he probably wanted it himself! What made it even sweeter was that the roster included my own favorite wrestler, "The Million Dollar Man" Ted DiBiase, and also his, the Undertaker.

The Survivor Series mode quickly became our favorite, arguing over who we got to pick and constantly trading wins due to our similar skill levels. The only thing that really irked us was that there were no finishing moves; something that seems hard to believe nowadays with modern WWE games having several. This would later be rectified by the Mega Drive version—mark one up on the "smugometer" for me as a Sega owner! We were also convinced that some wrestlers were better than others (they were all the same) and somehow the real tag teams played better together.

In hindsight, *WWF Super WrestleMania* certainly is not as good as it should have been; it was all looks and no substance for the most part. But that didn't stop us enjoying it and walking away from that controller every time with bruises and blisters from all the button bashing. – Kieren Hawken

WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game

Publisher: Acclaim.
Developer: Sculptured Software.
Game Type: Sports/Wrestling, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1995.



A port of Midway's *WWF WrestleMania* (arcade, 1995), *WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game* is of course a wrestling title, but it plays more like a fighting game. The bombastic action is amped up with combos, fast gameplay, timed rounds (99 seconds), and digitized fighters (á la *Mortal Kombat*). There are six professional wrestlers to fight as or against, each with a unique "mayhem move": Doink (joy buzzer), Razor Ramon (shakes opponent like a rug), Bret "Hit Man" Hart (sharpshooter), Shawn Michaels (Frankensteiner), The Undertaker (hurls punishing demons), and Lex Luger (medieval mace).

Other signature moves—depending on the wrestler—include ear slap, happy hammer, super clothesline, head slam, eye rake, rolling upper cut, vertical suplex, sunset flip, speed kick, piledriver, tombstone slam, neck bender, and more. There are standard moves such as run, punch, super punch, kick, super kick, and block. Players can even climb the turnbuckle and take the brawl outside the ring.

The challenge is to win the Intercontinental Championship or the World Wrestling Federation Championship, which comprise a variety of scenarios, including one-on-one, one-on-two, one-on-three, and two-on-two bouts. Button-mashing helps players get off the ropes or up off the mat. Vince McMahon provides play-by-play commentary. The view of the game is from the side, with the screen scrolling left and right a little to show the entire playfield. The Genesis, Sega 32X, PlayStation, and Saturn versions of *WWF WrestleMania: The Arcade Game* include Yokozuna and Bam Bam Bigelow, who are regrettably absent from the SNES version. Followed by *WWF in Your House* (PlayStation, Saturn).

Fun Fact: The lead programmer on the original arcade version of *WWF WrestleMania* was Mark Turmell, who is best known for *NBA Jam*.

Notable Quotable:

"Buy the Genesis or 32X (or even the Playstation) versions, but sweep this one under the mat." – *GamePro* (February 1996)

Notable Quotable:

"The SNES was the ONLY version to not carry the full roster. Even the inferior-looking and -sounding Genesis version of the game carried the full roster, AND didn't exclude sounds and voices like the SNES version . . . just a bad port." – Retrovania (www.retrovania.net)

Notable Quotable:

"I worked 16 hours a day, 7 days a week for 6 months to get *WWF WrestleMania* out. People play the game all day in my office and give me feedback, plus artists are always coming in with new ideas for me and my partner, Sal DiVita." – Mark Turmell (*GamePro*, November 1995), speaking about programming the arcade version of the game.

Xardion

Publisher: Asmik.
Developer: Jorudan.
Game Type: Platform Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

A trio of warring planets (Hollowsphere, Oceansphere, and Fierain) in the Alpha-1 Solar System are home to three distinct alien races. They wage battle against one another until they set aside their differences due to the threat of invasion from a much stronger alien race. To thwart this attack, they each send their most powerful robot warrior; you will control each one at various points in the game. The humanoid Triton can fire upwards and horizontally, while Alcedes, a beast bot/mage, and Panthera, a cat-like robot, can only fire horizontally. Panthera is short, meaning he can shoot smaller enemies and go into areas unreachable by the other characters. Alcedes, on the other hand, has special weaponry, such as a freeze attack.

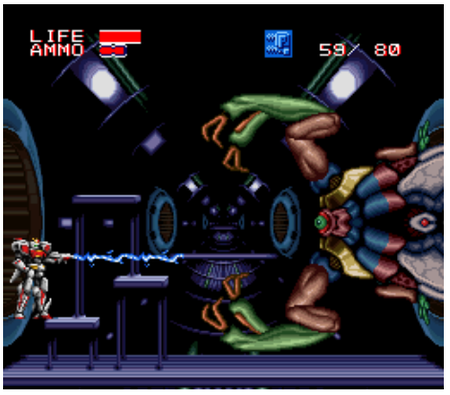
In addition to letting you switch between characters to utilize their distinct attributes, *Xardion* is noteworthy for featuring an experience system similar to a role-playing game. Defeating guardians, creatures, and other enemies earns the robot you are controlling points that will gradually increase its life and ammo gauges, as well as unlock new special techniques. In addition, each robot can gain and store power-ups to use whenever necessary. Items you can acquire include ammo, health, missiles, time bombs (which can blow up certain walls), and the ability to save at any point. You will walk, jump, and blast through nine levels spread among four planets and a space ship. Late in the game Xardion, the ultimate mecha cyborg, replaces Panthera. It fires blasts from an arm appendage.

Notable Quotable:

"*Xardion* is a relatively original game, but it lacks in a couple of areas: intensity and control." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (April 1992)

Notable Quotable:

"After you level up your characters, they become more enjoyable to control. They can jump a little higher, move a little faster, pack a bit more punch . . . The game requires a hefty amount of grinding to progress . . . As an example, the first-level boss is nearly impossible to defeat unless you level up at least one of your robots. I kept dying over and over again and I thought 'this sure is tough for a level-one boss!' I soon realized if I maxed out Triton's experience level, the first boss is a breeze . . . I completed the game on my first play-through. Took me about two-and-a-half hours! I feel bad for anyone who bought this game full price back in the day. This aspect alone screams rental . . . The graphics are nothing to write home about . . . They look very much like a NES game except more colors are used. Sprites are small for the most part. The only exception is the bosses . . . Sound effects are decent. I liked that as my robots got stronger, you could hear their footsteps, and their main weapon sounded more robust as it shot out." – SNES Hub (playingwithsuperpower.com)



X-Kaliber 2097

Publisher: Activision.
Developer: Fupac Winds.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat/Fighting, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1994.

The year is 2097. The place is Neo, New York. Krux—interdimensional monster run wild—has taken over the world, kidnapped your special agent partner, and converted your twin brother from a fine, upstanding citizen into an evil warlord. In addition, Krux's henchman Raptor has unleashed an army of morphs. You are Slash, and the fate of your partner and the rest of the world is in your hands. Luckily, you are armed with the X-Kaliber sword, which can unleash a powerful bolt of energy and deflect enemy projectiles.

You will run, jump, flip, climb, hack, slash, and stab your way through a dark future world of bikers, robots, mutants, morphs, and other enemies, including bosses that dish out such moves as a vine attack, icy breath, or a whirlwind maneuver. Boss fights are similar to a one-on-one fighting game. There are also an assortment of obstacles to jump over or otherwise avoid, including dripping acid, fire, mines, and lasers.

Eventually you must face your twin brother, who wields a sword as powerful as yours, and gas-breathing Spuke, who stands between you and Krux. The cartridge also includes a 2 Player Duel fighting mode. Pop-metal-rap band Psykosonik provides the soundtrack. *X-Kaliber 2097* is known as *Sword Maniac* in Japan.

Notable Quotable:
"This is an average side-scrolling hack-and-slash your way through the levels. Plenty of enemies to get rid of, yet the entire thing is boring and rather routine. The control isn't the best either, but fans of this type may like it." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Control is generally quick and easy, but one major drawback hinders the sword's efficiency: a time-delay of the slow energy bolt attack . . . Realistic urban backgrounds and an army of quick-moving enemies make this a fine-looking game. You might wish bosses were bigger and more awesome, as they were in *Mazin Saga* . . . The sounds steal the show . . . Psykosonik adds a powerful techno-beat . . . decent sound effects . . . While it's not the greatest hack-n-slash of all time, it's still upper echelon." – *GamePro* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"It's all very linear with lots of button-mashing and dodging, but to the game's credit it at least gives you a variety of buttons to mash, with

a few different sword attacks to choose from and a block button that comes in handy . . . What stands out here are the boss fights [but they] would work a lot better if the controls were changed to fit this mode. Instead, it's the same hack-and-slash button-mashing where you just spam your attack . . . *X-Kaliber 2097* does come across as kind of generic, but I don't want to be too hard on it. It does have some little things going for it. The design of the Slash character gives off kind of a Highlander vibe . . . the effect of effortlessly slicing something in half is pretty cool. You certainly get the impression they put a lot of effort into the visuals . . . the cut-scenes are well-done, and the sound design isn't too shabby, either. But the gameplay is just too ordinary to give anything more than a tepid recommendation." – SNES drunk (YouTube)

X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse

Publisher: Capcom.
Developer: Capcom.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Combat, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

One of the better, more faithfully adapted superhero games of the 1990s, *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse* finds the Genoshan government using Apocalypse to help control the nation's mutants. Professor X believes this will accelerate the conflict between humans and mutants, so he sends in a team of five X-Men, each of whom you control and has an individual mission.

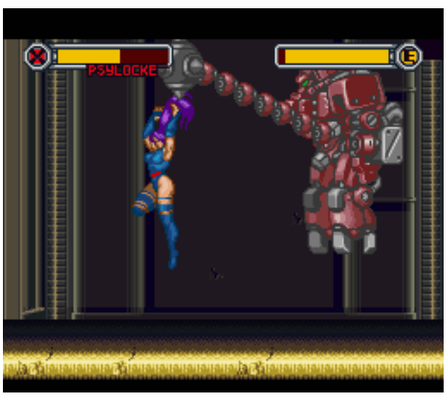
Cyclops can punch, kick (crescent and slide), and perform a variety of optic blasts. Wolverine attacks using his claws (slash, uppercut, running claw, berserker, flying berserker) and he can climb walls, though he lacks his healing powers. Psylocke generates a "psychic blade" with her telepathy, and she can elbow jab, flip kick, spin kick, quick slide, and do a flying knee attack and a neck cracker move. Possessing enhanced strength, speed, agility, dexterity, and acrobatic prowess, Beast can punch, walk on ceilings, and perform a crouching punch, a Beast bounce, a Beast charge, and a somersault kick. Gambit does a double kicking maneuver and can pull off a variety of playing card and staff attacks. Many of the moves require rapid multiple button presses, such as up twice on the control pad or down and Y simultaneously.

After you complete the individual missions—which you can play in any order—there are three linear levels where you choose which character to control. The *Final Fight*-style gameplay, which takes you through forests, caves, technologically advanced buildings, and the like, incorporates platforming into the action. There are moving platforms and elevators, and there are even occasional vehicles to ride. There are also bosses to battle, including robots, monsters, and such well-known supervillains as Sentinel, Omega Red, Magneto, and Juggernaut.

Notable Quotable:
"Gameplay is unrelenting and requires precision playing to make it through even the early levels. But those who have the patience to work their way through this challenging quest will be rewarded with one of the best comic book games out there." – *Game Informer* (October 2004)

Notable Quotable:
"X-Men, X-Men, X-Men . . . enough! These aren't even cool characters. Plain and simple run-of-the-mill side scrolling arcade action is all you'll find here. The graphics are of course great, but I've been down this road too many times. Why doesn't Capcom make a platformer with the *SF2* cast? Go with a winner . . . your winner, Capcom." – *GameFan Magazine* (December 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"For once, a game has done justice to one of my favorite comics. First thing's first, the gameplay is absolutely outstanding. Sure, there are *Street Fighter* moves, but who cares?



This isn't another *Final Fight*. The game requires skill and timing. The graphics are good, but not great, and the music is sort of blah. However, *X-Men* is fun to play, and that's what really counts." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1995)

Insider Insight:
If there was an era where the X-Men were on top of the world it would be the 1990s, with a successful animated TV series and many storylines that sent readers flocking to the comic books. I was as hooked as anyone. Sadly, their video game personas never fared as well as other mediums, especially for those of us who went with Super Nintendo instead of Sega Genesis. While both consoles had the decent *Spider-Man/X-Men: Arcade's Revenge* game, it was the Sega Genesis that got the well-made *X-Men* platformer. It took a few years before we Nintendo fans got our hands on our first really good X-Men title: *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse*.

This was the last game my parents got for me before I started my first job. I remember seeing the ads and hoping the game was as good as it looked. My brother and I ran to the family SNES and eagerly plugged the game in to play, feeling confident that it would be good since it was by Capcom. We were not disappointed. We had played every X-Men game Nintendo systems had to offer, but it was *X-Men: Mutant Apocalypse* that showed us what fun they could be.

My brother and I sat and played *Mutant Apocalypse* for what felt like forever. We liked that you chose the level you wanted to play with the X-Man that was onscreen. This allowed us to pick who wanted to play as which character. Each of their powers was perfectly usable for the player's enjoyment. – Zoe K. Howard

X-Zone

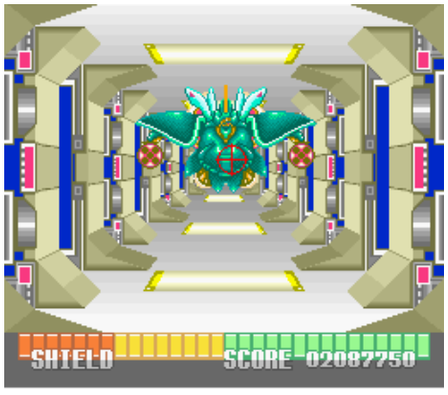
Publisher: Kemco.
Developer: Kemco.
Game Type: Light Gun Shooter, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

An otherwise ordinary (if quality) first-person light gun shooter, *X-Zone* makes good use of the Super Scope gun by allowing players to hold down the button for activating an on-screen cursor for precision aiming. If players take advantage of this feature it is not necessary to actually look through the scope, meaning the gun can be held in any fashion that feels comfortable.

Sporting seven levels and three difficulty settings, the game outfits players in an exo-armor combat suit equipped with shields for taking hits, anti-gravity boots for hovering through the desert and into the compound, and a plasma energy launcher for blasting drones, tanks, heavily armed robots, and other enemies. As you work your way through the game enemies assault you with missiles, machine gun fire, armor-piercing shells, and the like. Your overall mission is to prevent the nation's mainframe bio-computer from exterminating Earth. The action primarily scrolls to the right via typical ground-based battles, but you also float down from the sky while shooting enemies and avoiding their firepower.

Notable Quotable:
"You can hold your scope Terminator-style as this game has a cursor on screen at all times. Hurrah! No longer will you have to try to get back in focus after playing for a while, plus we're talking great graphics. Mindless but fun!" – *GameFan Magazine* (December 1992)

Notable Quotable:
"Up until now the Super Scope was a dust collector. Finally someone designed a game that not only works well with the bazooka, but it is fun and challenging to play. It is constant action, but with the on-screen cursor, at least you don't have to constantly squint through the sighting scope. Buy this one!" – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1993)



Yoshi's Cookie

Publisher: Bullet-Proof Software.
Developer: Bullet-Proof Software.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

Starring Mario's dinosaur buddy Yoshi, who made his first appearance in *Super Mario World*, *Yoshi's Cookie* is a highly original puzzler in which players use a cursor to shift horizontal rows and vertical columns of randomly sequenced cookies, making a row or column disappear when all the cookies in that line are the same type. If you remove more than one line in one move you score extra points. Cookie designs include heart, flower, diamond, check (resembles four checkerboard squares), circle, and Yoshi. Options include three music tracks (or no music) and three game speeds: low, medium, and fast.

In the one-player Action Game clearing the screen advances you to the next, more challenging stage. When you complete five lines of one cookie type you get a Yoshi cookie, which is a wild card that can be used to complete any type of cookie line. If the lines of cookies expand to the edge of the playfield it's game over. In the VS Game split-screen mode, you race against the computer or a friend to be the first to clear enough columns and rows. For every line you remove you will get a Yoshi cookie. If you remove a line of Yoshi cookies you can attack your opponent, such as removing their points, scrambling their cookies, placing a 3 × 3 grid of question marks over their playfield, or controlling their cursor (be careful, some attacks can backfire).

You can play as one of four different characters—Yoshi, Mario, Princess, and Koopa—each differing according to such attributes as attack (the length of time of an attack) and defense (ability to defend against attacks). The SNES game is similar to its NES counterpart, with more than 100 levels of fun, strategic puzzle action, but the graphics have been upgraded to include some backgrounds and the Mario character designs from *Super Mario World*. In addition, there is a Puzzle mode that gives you a limited number of moves to clear all the cookies from the playfield.

Fun Fact: The manual says "Puzzles created by Alexey Pajitnov and BPS" (Bullet-Proof Software), meaning the legendary creator of *Tetris* had his hand in the design of the game.

Notable Quotable:

"A skillfully designed puzzle game with plenty of lasting appeal thanks to the selection of games available. The wonderful *Mario World* characterization is the icing on the cookie." – *Nintendo Magazine System* (1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The graphics are merely average considering the system's power . . . The sound is light and bouncy, but shouldn't there be more than three tracks? The music is nowhere near as good as the tunes from *Dr. Mario* or *Tetris* on the NES . . . The game can be a little tricky to control at times thanks to a slow-moving cursor. The different modes offer a nice balance of gameplay, however, and you'll be hooked after a few tries." – Scott Alan Marriott (formerly at allgame.com)

Insider Insight:
Have you ever played a game that made you ask yourself, "This game has an ending!?" And when you present that same question to your peers, it turns out they have the same response? That was me when I played and finished *Yoshi's Cookie* in mid-January 2018. This was a game I would play once in a blue moon just to kill time, not to actually make an attempt to complete it.

One night I decided to load it up and see how far I could get. Seven levels in the background was Bowser's Castle, so I figured that this would be the last level. I was wrong and level eight made its presence. Mind you, each level has ten stages, so level eight was starting, meaning I had finished seventy stages. My *Super Mario* game logic backfired when Bowser's Castle was not the last level in the game. So to my dismay I continued playing.

By the time I reached the mid-stages of level nine I was getting burned out on playing and seeing so many cookies fill the screen, trying to clear them all as fast as possible. Ten full levels and 100 stages later I was wiped out from playing. This coming from someone who has played *Dr. Mario* for four hours straight, from level 0 to level 40. The only difference is I enjoy playing *Dr. Mario.*

After finishing level ten of *Yoshi's Cookie* I watched the cut-scene and noticed something was different about it. This cut-scene has a cliffside with Mario and Yoshi's face, something the previous levels do not have. Once Yoshi and Mario meet a runaway cookie in center screen the credits start rolling. I reacted with disbelief that *Yoshi's Cookie* actually has an ending. I took a picture of my TV with "END" in the middle of it and presented the photo to some fellow gamers and asked them, "Did you know there's an ending to *Yoshi's Cookie*?" Nobody knew until I posted the picture. – Paul Tesi

Yoshi's Safari

Publisher: Nintendo.
Developer: Nintendo.
Game Type: Light Gun Shooter, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A radical departure from the expansive platformer *Super Mario World*, which featured the first appearance of Yoshi, *Yoshi's Safari* is a Super Scope light gun game viewed from a *Super Mario Kart*-like perspective. As Mario rides his dinosaur buddy around twisting, turning tracks, you aim the gun at the screen, firing away at Flying Goombas, Koopa Para Troopas, Cheep Cheeps, Bowser, and other enemies, including bosses wearing armor and shooting at you. Shooting at large gates unlocks secrets and hidden areas.

If Yoshi is hit with friendly fire he will lose health and turn around and give you a dirty look, exemplifying the cute, kid-friendly nature of this game. The action is linear, the game is short and easy to beat, and the background music is delightful, further defining this as a juvenile title. The pseudo 3D graphics are very impressive, as are the Mode 7 effects, but the shooting sounds can get annoying. At the end of the game you get a code for a more difficult version of the game that has different level colors and harder bosses.

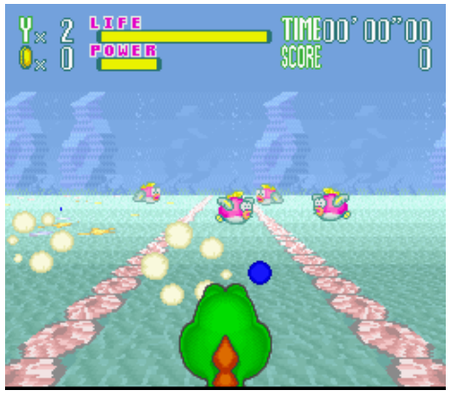
In the two-player mode, the second gamer uses a standard controller to guide Yoshi, who can duck, jump over gaps, slow down (he moves forward automatically), and turn right and left. Your ultimate goal in *Yoshi's Safari* is to retrieve twelve crystals to save the Kingdom from those evil Koopalings.

Notable Quotable:

"Visually, the game is actually quite good. The levels have a lot of vividness to them, and even objects in the far distance look good, which is good because there are often times where a player will need to shoot something in the distance. The new-look enemies like ParaGoombas and such have a nice touch to them, and the overall visual appeal of the game is high. The audio in *Yoshi's Safari* is a bit different—you won't find any classic Mario tunes here. Instead, there's a complete new set of tracks. Each level has its own theme, some better than others . . . The only downfall from the audio are the sound effects—some of them are a bit repetitive and are a little bit on the annoying side, such as when Yoshi gets hit by an enemy . . . for a quick game to play, it's not that bad." – Mario Legacy (www.mariolegacy.com)

Notable Quotable:

"Mario creator Miyamoto was the producer. Late president Iwata directed it. Two of Nintendo's biggest names headed up this project. About Mario shooting his enemies. With a gun. It's about as innocent and Nintendo as it can get, but it's funny in premise alone . . . I love how it gives me a reason to pull out my Super Scope . . . The premise of *Yoshi's Safari* is basic even by Mario standards . . . It's an on-rails shooter with a barrage of classic Mario enemies trying to take you out by land and sea, but mostly air. You have a health meter and shot meter, both of which can be upgraded by shooting item blocks and getting the right item . . . There's a decent amount of Mario's platforming elements thrown in for good measure . . . Nothing outstanding, or anything I'd ever play again, but I genuinely enjoyed my time with it. It's more of a conversation piece than a fantastic experience." – Influential Gaming (www.influentialgaming.com)



Young Merlin

Publisher: Virgin Games.
Developer: Westwood Studios.
Game Type: Third-Person Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

In his never-ending quest for power, the Shadow King has released his evil minions in a peaceful land. As Young Merlin, it is your job to destroy the king's forces and restore order and peace. As you travel throughout the land, solving puzzles and interacting with the game's inhabitants, you can pick up items and weapons, such as matches, keys, combs, shooting stars, lightning bolts, silver stars, snowflakes, air bubbles, balloons, bubble wands, flowers, and lanterns. These and other items help you do such things as fly, attack enemies, clone your image, and beautify yourself to distract the enemies. With an assist from the Lady of the Lake, you can use gems to create magical items. Flowers can also be used to create magic.

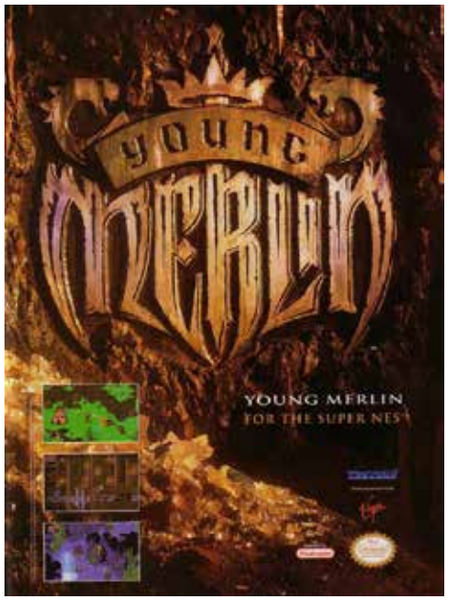
The good guys in this game—which features many plains, caves, and dungeons to explore—include mermaids who provide you with air; an elf who gives you a new rune for your staff; and Melody, a fair maiden who Merlin is most taken with. The Shadow King's minions include the dumb but brutal Oinkmers, the hooded Shroom Goons, the man-eating Vile-Ettes, the thorny Snarl Shoots, and the overly fertile Spyder. Other enemies include piranhas, dwarves, trolls, and Meanies, which are small creatures that can combine into larger monsters.

At the end of the game, you must defeat the Shadow King himself. Mine cart levels, a distinct lack of text (thought bubbles display simple icons), lush forests, and large, colorful graphics set *Young Merlin* apart from *The Legend of Zelda* and similar top-down RPGs.

Notable Quotable:
"This game strikes a good middle ground between fast action and slow RPGs. The levels are huge, the control is good, and the graphics are up to the Virgin par. The game is somewhat long, but there are plenty adventures in store." – *Electronic Gaming Monthly* (January 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"*Young Merlin* is a fun and entertaining sidebar to more serious RPGs. If you love fantasy games with dragons, damsels, and danger, but you don't want to worry about hit points or personality alignments, then sit down with Young Merlin and give him a hand in his quest." – *GamePro* (March 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Almost all non-boss enemies are so slow that getting hit by them is an insult, and there is no money or experience to obtain. The only things that enemies drop are hearts that restore some life and four-leaf clovers. The clovers also restore life after collecting 12 of them, but sometimes they will instead give you three seconds of invincibility . . . puzzles [are] impossibly ridiculous and without any trace of logic. In one scenario, you have to get past an army of goblins. Instead of fighting, you have to BLOW BUBBLES AT THEM!!! Not acid-filled bubbles, not magic bubbles, but plain, ordinary soap bubbles . . . decent graphics and music . . . The characters were done brilliantly . . . Although slightly pixilated, they have decent coloring and great animations. Seeing Merlin get punched, strangled, or electrocuted throughout his quest was probably the best part of the game . . . Movement is very stiff, and the fact that a single touch from an enemy can induce incredible amounts of damage doesn't help much. Your attacks are even worse. The speed at which you can cast spells is annoyingly slow, especially for the ones that require recharge time between uses. The game is still playable, but they could have done better." – RPG Fan (www.rpgfan.com)



Ys III: Wanderers from Ys

Publisher: American Sammy Corporation.
Developer: Tonkin House.
Game Type: Third-Person Action Role-Playing Game, 1 player.
Year: 1992.

The follow-up to *Ys The Vanished Omens* (Sega Master System) and *Ys Book I and II* (TurboGrafx-CD), *Ys III* turns the series inside out by changing the formula from overhead to side-view perspective. Also the swordplay is more visceral and action oriented, the protagonist can jump, and players can use magical rings for shields, healing, invincibility, increased attack power, and forcing enemies to move in slow motion. Battle accoutrements consist of swords (short, long, broad, banded, and flame), armor (leather, chain mail, plate mail, banded, and battle), and shields (wood, small, large, banded, and battle).

As you explore a haunted coal mine, the heart of an active volcano, the top of a blizzard-swept peak, and other areas you will battle monsters, gain experience, grab gold, open doors with keys, use items to solve puzzles, and more. Dramatic music, nice graphics, and a cinematic storyline complement the RPG action. Battery backup lets you save your progress in fifteen different files. The Genesis version of the game has slightly inferior visuals, while the TurboGrafx-16 CD rendition has far superior sound. Followed by *Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim* (PS2, PSP).

Notable Quotable:

"An above average side-scrolling RPG similar to *Zelda II*. The music is great, but the difficulty can be unforgiving." – *Nintendo Power Magazine* (1992)

Notable Quotable:

"*Ys* (that's pronounced "ease," not "wise") is one of those classic role-playing games adults can have a hard time getting used to: the kind where you're hailed as a savior by beleaguered townspeople, given a sword and various magical powers, and charged with restoring peace to the land of Fill-in-the-Blank, at which point you venture forth bravely and get slaughtered by the first insignificant bug that happens to cross your path. Once you learn how to fight back, though, *Ys* is an interesting enough adventure, until it becomes somewhat tedious: Since you have to follow a prearranged storyline, there's little room for surprise or experimentation, and after a while the battles (even against more evolved creatures than bugs) start to seem awfully repetitive." – *Entertainment Weekly* (February 1992)

Insider Insight:
First there is the fanfare that blares excitedly from the moment you turn the system on. Then the cinematic opening when you start a new game. What should be a routine homecoming for Adol and his companion Dogi turns into a rescue mission to save some trapped miners. From there, events balloon wildly until Adol's sword, magic rings, and stylish choice of armor are all that stand between the resurrection of an ancient evil and the destruction of a country. I could not be happier that I had chosen it for my first SNES title.

Back up a bit—being poor, I didn't pick up Nintendo's 16-bit system until it dropped to $99. Since the package only included one base unit, one controller, and no pack-in cart, I needed something to play. Walmart had a variety of $20 titles, and *Wanderers from Ys* looked the coolest from the cover art: a guy with a sword fighting a wizard and a dragon? Sign this *D&D*-loving geek up, baby!

Ys III blew me away with its beautiful soundtrack, sucked me in with its simplistic gameplay, and sent me reeling from some difficult boss fights. It was just the sort of game I was looking for to start my SNES collection, and while it was not the first game for the system I ever played, it was the first I bought with my own money.

Objectively, there are many superior games across many other genres, and even competing hardware of the day. Subjectively though, *Ys III* confirmed I had made the right choice to wait for a Super Nintendo instead of going for the Genesis. My library has grown considerably since then, but even though I have experienced other versions and even the enhanced remake, it is this version that is, to me, the definitive one. The others can't compare with the rose-tinted lenses of nostalgia, but as far as I'm concerned, that is just fine. I don't mind being wrong when it feels so right. – Michael Crisman

Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel

Publisher: Sunsoft.
Developer: Iguana Entertainment.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1994.

An off-shoot of the *Aero the Acrobat* series, *Zero the Kamikaze Squirrel* casts former villain Zero in the role of hero. Somewhat similar to Sonic the Hedgehog, who inspired so many attitudinal platform characters, the jeans- and bandana-wearing Zero runs, jumps (including double jumps for reaching secret areas), and flips his way through a variety of colorful worlds, including a beach, caves, cliffs, a volcano, the forest, and a toxic waste sewer. Zero can also throw shurikens, lash out with nunchakus, swoop like a superhero, fly via jet pack, perform super dives, and collect Z icons for points. At certain points he drives a jet ski and a speed boat.

Zero's mission is to defeat Jacques Le Sheets, an evil lumberjack trying to cut down a forest to create paper used for money counterfeiting. Enemies to dispense with include crabs, gunmen, robot guards, mining workers, beanie cap-wearing baddies, and an assortment of oddball creatures. He must also dodge such obstacles as spikes, molten lava, and falling boulders.

This entertaining game has more than its share of blind jumps and other cheap deaths, but lots of extra lives and unlimited continues make it easily beatable. Rated MA-13, *Zero* is one of the edgier platformers of the era. The game plays a little faster and sounds a little better than the Genesis version. The two games look virtually identical but for some subtle differences (i.e., the SNES rendition has transparency effects).

Notable Quotable:

"Despite its drawbacks, *Zero*'s worth a play or 2 or 10. The unlimited continues are an asset, but younger players may still be frustrated. However, if you have the patience, *Zero* has the game." – *GamePro* (January 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"The game copies Sonic's running speed (to a point) but without the loops, and with wholly linear and boring levels . . . the main problem with this game is Zero's attack. He has a stock of shurikens, but insists on twirling in a circle before throwing one." – Plato's Cavern (www.platoscavern.com)

Zombies Ate My Neighbors

Publisher: Konami.
Developer: LucasArts.
Game Type: Overhead View Action, 1–2 players (simultaneous).
Year: 1993.

A scrolling, more methodical (though still quickly paced), more adventurous take on the gameplay found in such titles as *Robotron* and *Smash T.V.*, *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* is a bona fide cult classic, with players—as either Zeke or Julie (both teenagers)—running around suburbia, using a squirt gun to battle such creepy creatures as blobs, mummies, Martians, pod plants, vampires, evil dolls, lizard men, giant ants, and of course, zombies. There are also speed shoes for going faster, decoys for distracting enemies, first aid kits to restore your life bar, keys for opening doors, potions for powering up into a purple beast or a free-roaming specter, and innocents to rescue for points. Said innocents include babies, dogs, cheerleaders, tourists, inner tubers, evil school teachers, soldiers, and the like.

To help you along the way, you can pick up a variety of fun-to-use weapons, such as footballs, plates, tomatoes, an uzi squirt gun, a fire extinguisher (freeze enemies), ice pops (for use against jelly blobs), silverware (effective against werewolves), a bazooka (blow holes through cracked walls and weak spots in hedges), exploding soda pop cans (similar to hand grenades), a Martian bubble gun (captures target in a temporary bubble), and a weed eater (cut through weeds as well as monsters). You can also grab ancient artifacts, which are talismans that produce spinning fire that protects you and destroys monsters.

The game features fifty-five monstrous levels, each with a fun theme, such as a grocery store gone bad, a demented shopping mall, a mysterious island, Mars Needs Cheerleaders, Dancing with Werewolves, and Weird Kids on the Block. Yes, film, monster, and pop culture references abound, as does a heaping helping of tongue-in-cheek humor. Not only is *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* a blast to play, it is a lighthearted, highly welcome nod to B-movie cinema.

The SNES version looks and sounds better than the Genesis game, though blood in the SNES cart is green or purple instead of red, keeping with Nintendo's family-friendly policies. In the SNES game you have to push a button to display the radar, while the Genesis version is more convenient, in that it shows the radar on screen at all times. However, the radar does compress the playfield in the Genesis game, making it smaller.

Notable Quotable:

"Graphics are dynamite. You'll get a major kick out of the nicely detailed, cartoony sprites . . . sounds are sick and slick. Creepy creatures babble incoherently, werewolves howl ferociously, and your neighbors cut loose with horrific screams . . . The old-fashioned, melodramatic background music is campy but catchy . . . weapons are imaginative . . . crisp controls . . . the prize doesn't necessarily go to the quick-fingered. Strategy is also paramount." – *GamePro* (August 1993)

Notable Quotable:

"The game has aged beautifully . . . If a single title illustrates the graphic and audio superiority of the SNES over the Genesis, it's *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* . . . a lighthearted shooter . . . style and good humor . . . The creatures are rendered with a wacky flair, and the lush scenery is fun to explore . . . Certain weapons are pitifully weak, but at least you can cycle through them . . . The game is expertly programmed, and the controls are super responsive. Two players can cooperate, but sharing the screen is problematic so it's best to let one player lead the way. The rollicking musical score sets the mood perfectly, alternating between ominous and playful." – The Video Game Critic (videogamecritic.com)

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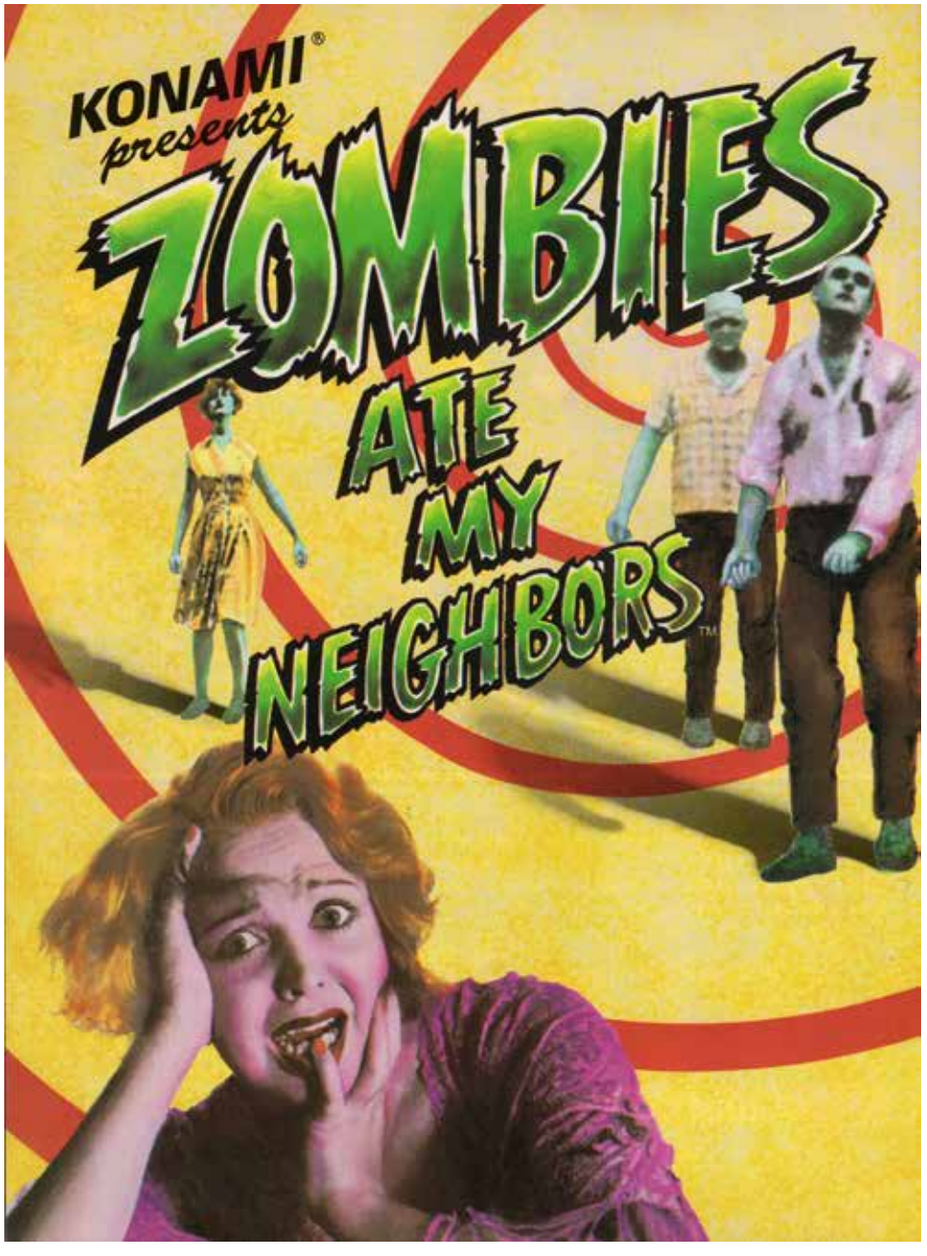


Insider Insight:
"So call the neighbor kids, the trash can lids, with buckets on their heads, cause I'm telling you, we're gonna need a little help tonight." That is how the hit single, "Zombies Ate My Neighbors," from my kid brother's band, Single File, starts, paying homage to the game of the same name. The first time I heard that song on the radio in Denver, apart from the goosebumps covering my body, I immediately imagined myself in-game, gunning down Chucky knock-offs with my squirt gun or getting trounced on by fifty-foot giant babies. It didn't occur to me at the time how much of an impact *Zombies* had on my thirteen-year-old brother, as I sort of figured that with all of the tormenting we did at his expense, such as "edging" him off the screen to get killed and hogging all the bonus items, he would have a dour disposition to the game. Thankfully I was wrong, and every time I play *Zombies* I am reminded that chainsaws are still fun. – Dain Anderson

Insider Insight:
Few cartridges in my collection got a workout like *Zombies Ate My Neighbors*. It was as though the programmers took my love of horror movies and reimagined it into one of my favorite games on the platform. *Zombies* would pull me in and make me lose track of time. My brother and I spent days dissecting the game, trying to figure out what weapons work best against which enemies. We kept a notebook for making a list of passwords to jump to levels if we both died.

My favorite memory of the game is from the day my brother got married. Instead of getting ready for his wedding, we were hanging out at our house, playing *Zombies*. I remember pausing so we could quickly get dressed for the wedding and then returning to the game wearing tuxedos. Even now, when my brother and I get together on occasion to play video games, this title remains a favorite.

Zombies is fun when played solo, but cooperative mode is best. It is perfect for extended game sessions, as well as when you only have a few minutes to play. The levels are fun to explore and discover secrets in, and the music and sound effects are amazing. To this day hearing the chainsaw in the Hedge Maze Mayhem level sends chills down my spine. – Anthony J. La Gambina

Zool: Ninja of the Nth Dimension

Publisher: GameTek.
Developer: Gremlin Graphics Software.
Game Type: Side-Scrolling Platformer, 1 player.
Year: 1993.

Adapted from the 1992 Amiga computer game of the same name, *Zool* is a *Sonic the Hedgehog*-influenced platformer that sends the title character careening through seven large, cartoonish, colorful, and downright bizarre worlds: Sweet, Music, Fruit, Tool, Toy, Desert Island, and Fairground. You will shoot energy bolts at, spin into, and otherwise battle drums, radios, apples, candy, bananas, bumblebees, and other such cartoonish enemies.

Zool has a nifty spinning attack, he climbs and clings to walls similar to Ryu from *Ninja Gaiden II*, and he can increase his firepower with a spectral body double. He also collects helpful items, including hearts (for your life bar), smart bombs, shields, and higher jumping ability, along with tons of extra point items, such as candy canes, fruit, and record albums. In each level he must find the exit and fight a boss, such as a spike-collared banana and a fire-shooting guitar with eyes. There are many, many spikes to dodge, and enemies frequently pop up unexpectedly, making them frustratingly tough to anticipate, especially since Zool runs so fast (though the game does move a little slower than the Genesis port).

Zool was also released for the Game Boy and Game Gear. A sequel, *Zool 2*, followed on home computers, but the only console it was released for was the Atari Jaguar.

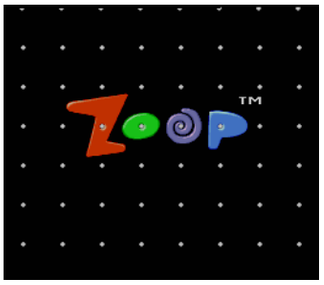
Fun Fact: In 1995, Boxtree released a pair of young adult novels based on the game: *Cool Zool* and *Zool Rules*. They were written by Stan Nicholls and Ian Edginton, and are now highly collectible.

Notable Quotable:
"*Zool* is a tough game with great-looking graphics. If you think you're a pugnacious platform player, *Zool* will take you to school." – *GamePro* (February 1994)

Notable Quotable:
"Zool moves quickly, and it's very easy to accidentally run into enemies or their projectiles before you even know they are there . . . you are going to get hit a lot . . . the level design is mediocre at best and maddening at worst. *Zool* has very little flow to it . . . The camera moves all over the screen, and you can barely see where you are going to land or where you are headed. The game just feels really chaotic and for all the wrong reasons . . . The jumping feels loose, and it's hard to make any sort of precise landing. Thankfully, the game doesn't have bottomless pits, but at times you are forced to do an awful lot of backtracking as you fall from a high-up place . . . it's not a bad-looking game . . . a unique look I genuinely find appealing . . . This doesn't sound like a SNES game, featuring instrument samples I rarely hear on the system." – IMPLANTgames (YouTube)

Zoop

Publisher: Viacom New Media.
Developer: Hookstone.
Game Type: Action Puzzle, 1–2 players (alternating).
Year: 1995.



In the *Advance Edition* of the *Digital Press Collector's Guide*, *Zoop* is referred to as "*Cosmic Ark* meets *Tetris*," and that is a fairly apt description of this time-draining puzzler. The object of *Zoop* is to eliminate a random sequence of colored shapes advancing toward you from the four sides of a square-shaped grid. You control a shape-shooting triangle trapped in the center square of this grid. You can maneuver the triangle up, down, right, and left. If you shoot a shape that is the same color as you, it will disappear from the screen (entire rows of the same color can be destroyed at once). If you shoot a shape of a different color, you will switch colors with that shape and the shape will remain on the grid. When you have cleared enough shapes from the playfield you will advance to the next level, and the action will get faster and more crowded.

In each of the ninety-nine levels power-ups randomly appear on the grid: proximity bomb (blows up pieces in a 3 × 3 area centered at the target piece); line bomb (clears the entire target line of pieces); and color bomb (clears all the pieces in a quadrant that match the target piece). Also if you collect five spring pieces, the entire playfield will be cleared out.

Zoop is an excellent game for many reasons: elegant simplicity, high level of challenge, and engrossing gameplay. Maneuvering the little triangle, quickly switching its color scheme, and desperately trying to keep all the shapes from entering your territory is challenging and a whole lot of fun. You will constantly feel like the odds are against you (they are), so when you do make it past a level your spirits will soar—at least for a second or two, until the next wave of shapes begins descending on you.

One thing that would have been nice is a two-player mode. The ability to control advancing shapes while a friend tries to keep you from invading his center square would add another dimension to this already fine game. A two-player cooperative mode would be interesting as well, especially when the game gets too difficult to go it alone.

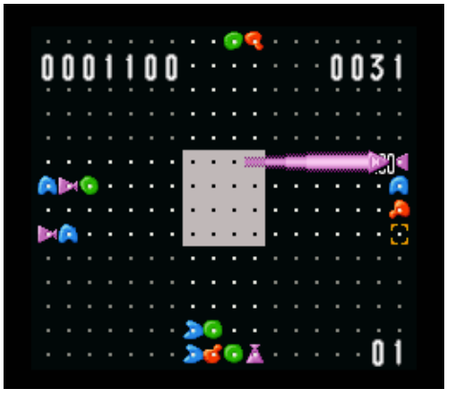
The SNES version of *Zoop* is similar to its Genesis counterpart, but with one overriding exception: the controls. In the Genesis version, when you aim your triangle up it sometimes goes to the left or the right. Neither game has perfect controls, but the Super Nintendo control pad works better in this case. You will quickly become addicted to either version, but the Super Nintendo game is a more satisfying, less frustrating experience. *Zoop* was also released for the PlayStation (in a long box), Game Boy, and Jaguar.

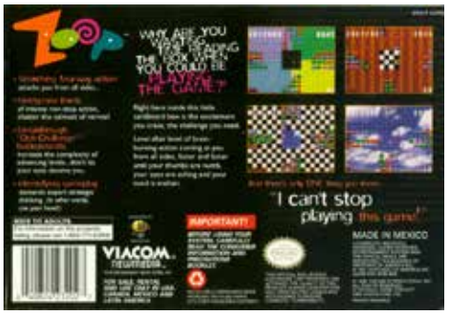
Notable Quotable:

"*Zoop*'s a respectable puzzler, but it lacks the addictive grip of top-grade games like *Kirby's Avalanche* and *Tetris*. What it does offer is simple, fun gameplay." – *GamePro* (December 1995)

Notable Quotable:

"This simple mechanic is the sum total of the gameplay, but like all good puzzle games it remains solid over a decade beyond its initial release. The excellent jazzy soundtrack, which evolves with the gameplay as the blocks encroach even faster, stands out as well." – *Game Informer* (November 2008)





THE SUPER GAME BOY

By Zoe Howard

With the success of both the handheld Game Boy (1989) and the Super Nintendo home console (1991 in North America), Nintendo found itself the masters of both the portable and home video game markets, despite good competition, especially from Sega. Both machines sold incredibly well, gaining in momentum over the first few years after their release. Three years after the Super Nintendo hit store shelves Nintendo, with the help of the hardware developers at Hori, released the Super Game Boy.

The Super Game Boy, which lets you play Game Boy games on your television set, is a cartridge that plugs into the SNES cartridge slot. You insert the Game Boy cartridge into a slot on the Super Game Boy. The design is simple on the exterior; the unit is roughly an inch-and-a-half taller than a standard Super Nintendo cartridge. This allows the Game Boy game to fit in the top of the Super Game Boy and still leave space for the internal circuitry.

The idea behind an adapter that allows you to play Game Boy games on a home console was nothing new to Nintendo. They already had a form of the technology that plugged into the disk drive port on the bottom of the Famicom to produce the same effect. This early technology, called the Wide-Boy, was created by the company Intelligent Systems Co., LTD. The original unit had a controller hardwired to the adapter, much like with the Famicom itself, and relied on the console solely for power and video memory that ran to the TV. Though the early device was only meant for media presentations, which also included developing and testing the games companies were making, it quickly became an idea that Nintendo would discuss bringing to the open market.

The Wide-Boy would stick around over the next few consoles strictly as a development tool for companies making Game Boy games. The Nintendo 64 saw two models on its console: one was designed for development of Game Boy Color games (referred to as Wide-Boy 64 CGB), while the other (called the Wide-Boy 64 VGB) was used to help develop Game Boy Advance games. The last two versions of the hardware were on the Nintendo 64. Both versions of Wide-Boys used a large cartridge much like the Super Game Boy that you would insert into the cart before putting it in the console.

The biggest difference was that the Wide-Boy used a set of wires coming out of it that went to a Game Boy Color or Game Boy Advance handheld console. The handheld unit acted as the controller, while the N64 console once again served as power and audio/video to the television. I have seen editions of both the Wide-Boy 64 CGB (Color Game Boy) and Wide-Boy 64 AGB (Advance Game Boy) able to be played using a Nintendo 64 controller. This must have been put in place for the possibility of mass market production. These Wide-Boys were sadly unable to reach market due to the overwhelming price it would cost per machine, so they remained solely for companies to use as development tools.

Another device Nintendo created was the Nintendo Demo Vision. This unit connected to up to two external Game Boys and allowed them to transmit audio/video information that was displayed through the Demo Vision and on to a monitor. This device also used a Game Boy-like wallpaper around the framed video it displayed. These were commonly used in retail store Game Boy displays and at trade shows to show off the newest games. The Game Boys attached to the machine were also powered by the Demo Vision.

Camerica—a Canadian company primarily known for their unlicensed games on the NES, along with gaming accessories like the Game Genie—was set to release their own version of a Game Boy adapter for the Nintendo Entertainment System in the early '90s. The device allowed Game Boy games to be plugged in to the top of what looked like a standard NES cartridge. The cartridge then pulled a copy of the ROM on to its own hardware and allowed it to speak directly with the NES console. (This is similar to how many of the modern emulation consoles work.) Camerica's device was even written about in the June 1991 issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. Though the device was never released, both the article itself and online speculation from fans concluded that Camerica feared backlash from Nintendo.

While it is true no Game Boy adapter saw the light of day on the NES, it found a home on the SNES. The inside of the Super Game Boy cartridge features the same hardware as the Game Boy. This was required, since the Super Nintendo was not capable of emulating the BIOS (a chip that contains firmware that controls all of a computer input and output operations) of the handheld system. The board had all the familiar pieces, except for the output hardware. The Super Nintendo acted as the audio/video output and controller interface for the hardware inside the Super Game Boy.

The Super Game Boy also contains a separate CPU that actually processes the game.

The Super Game Boy is responsible for adding color to the Game Boy games. The colors take the place of the shades of grey that the handheld Game Boy displayed on screen. This direct access to color control is what allows the SGB to fully interact with the games that were designed specifically for the device; therefore it does not have to rely on the Super Nintendo for much outside of interaction with the user.

Color is achieved by utilizing the four shades of green used in the Game Boy's monochromatic display. The Super Game Boy lets you color in the different shades to give the effect of color for the home console. Still images on the screen are able to go as high as ten individual colors (this maximum amount was only achieved later on games specifically designed for the Super Game Boy), while graphics in motion are restricted to fewer colors. Industrious game designers found ways to add more colors in places that were once thought impossible. The games were pushed to their limits, leaving only the hardware to hold them back.

Although it was a cool device, the Super Game Boy was not flawless. One issue is that it is slightly over-clocked compared to the handheld system (the portable Game Boy runs at 4.194 MHz while the Super Game Boy runs at 4.295 MHz). This is due to the clock speed of the Super Nintendo being faster than that of the Game Boy; it caused some stuttering issues, as well as problems with the audio. It is most noticeable when playing games with timers; if you were to play them side-by-side, you would notice that the counter on the Super Game Boy moves faster.

Another issue was the lack of compatibility with the Game Link Cable, since there was no link cable port on the Super Game Boy. The Game Link Cable allows gamers to play with a friend by connecting Game Boy consoles for cooperative play, head-to-head competition, trading items, unlocking hidden features, etc., in certain games. A less egregious problem

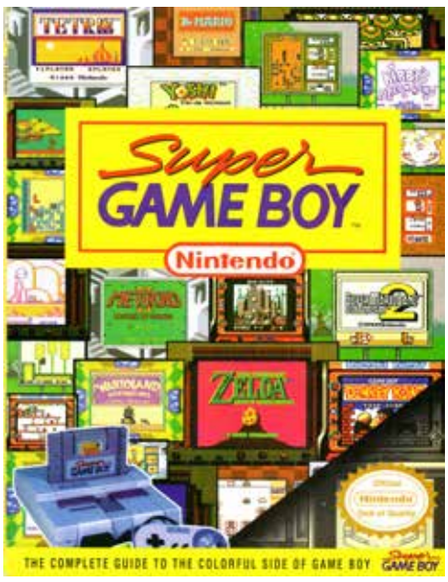
was that many Game Boy games, especially those released before the Super Game Boy, did not take advantage of the second controller port on the SNES for two-player gaming.

Getting back to the usability of the Super Game Boy, after you put your Game Boy game of choice into the Super Game Boy and then plug the device into the Super Nintendo, it starts up like any cartridge after you turn on the power. The only difference is when you press the L and R buttons together, a menu pops up allowing you to tailor your experience to some degree. The first option is the color pallets. There are thirty-two pre-set pallets of four colors you can choose from to help design your experience. There is also a custom color setting that allows you to combine your own choices of colors, giving you control of how the images on the screen appear.

The next option is the wallpaper (or border) option. There are nine built-in borders that you can choose from. If you do not wish to use these you can switch to graffiti mode and design your own background. If you are playing a game that has its own wallpapers built in the Super Game Boy will automatically switch to that once the game loads. Some of the games with preloaded wallpapers and color pallets will not let you switch off of them.

While games for the Super Game Boy were originally just the Game Boy cartridges, developers began creating games with the adapter in mind. They were visually identifiable by an image on the games and boxes that let you know it was designed for the Super Game Boy. The image had words under it stating that the game is a Super Game Boy game pack. Games with Super Game Boy functionality were usually black Game Boy Color carts instead of the traditional gray.

The games would vary regarding which type of enhancements they contained. Some had custom backgrounds made exclusively for them, while others had preset codes for color pallet swaps, allowing the game to look more like an actual console title. Games like *Wario Blast: Featuring Bomberman*, *Battle Arena Toshinden*, and *Killer Instinct* took advantage of the fact there was a second controller port on the console. *Wario Blast: Featuring Bomberman* also utilized Hudson Soft's Super Multitap, allowing up to four players to play on one console.



To supplement the Super Game Boy, Nintendo sent out a seventy-two-page player's guide to *Nintendo Power* subscribers. The guide was later packaged with the Super Game Boy. The book contained small strategy guides for some of the games, as well as pallet combination codes for various popular Game Boy games that they felt would work great together. Some of the games featured in the guide were *Metroid II: Return of Samus*, *The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening*, and *Super Mario Land 2: Six Golden Coins*.

Nintendo went a step farther by programming into the Super Game Boy wallpapers and auto loading color pallets (onto the SGB adapter itself) for games they produced before the device was released. This allowed players to enjoy games like *Super Mario Land* with the new color pallet features.

A select group of games was designed to utilize the more powerful console they were attached to. *Kirby's Dreamland 2*, as well as *Contra III: The Alien Wars*, for example, have enhanced sound effects. *Donkey Kong*, which was released alongside the Super Game Boy, included voice samples when played through the Super Game Boy, as well as a robust color scheme on certain images. Most impressively, the Game Boy edition of *Space Invaders* has a Super Nintendo-quality version of the game on the Game Boy cart. This makes it the only Game Boy game that allows you to pick between either the standard Game Boy game or a Super Nintendo rendition.

Hori—the company that helped design the Super Game Boy—eventually released a special controller designed specifically for use with the SGB cart (Japanese release only) called the SGB Commander. The controller took the more traditional layout design of the Game Boy and repositioned the four extra Super Nintendo buttons along the top of the A and B buttons for use as settings buttons. This was in addition to the standard directional pad and the A, B, Select, and Start buttons. The settings buttons controlled the speed of the game, changed the pallet colors, and muted the audio. There is also a switch above Start and Select that changes the controller's functionality from Super Game Boy Mode and Super Famicom mode. This would allow you to use the same controller for your Super Famicom games as well.

In 1998, Nintendo released the Super Game Boy 2, updating the few flaws of the first unit. The device was no longer over-clocked and

ran at the same speed as its handheld predecessor. This allowed for more fluid audio and visuals, as well as better controls. Another new feature was a link port that allowed you to connect one Super Game Boy to another for multiplayer games. You could also connect this port to a handheld Game Boy for two-player games, as well as trading games like *Pokémon*. *Pokémon* alone was the reason the Super Game Boy 2 was created. Fans of the highly successful games complained they were unable to interact with their friends without using the handheld system. Sadly, the Super Game Boy 2 was only released in Japan, as North America had since moved on to the Nintendo 64.

The Super Gameboy 2's shell is visually different from the first model. The plastic is a transparent blue, allowing you to see the board inside. The SGB2 cartridge also includes two LED lights internally that shine through. The red acts as a power light, while the green signals the attachment of the link cable. Plus, there are seven new wallpapers to use during gameplay. These replaced the original wallpapers that were included in the first SGB, except for the blank screen and Game Boy wallpaper. Unlike the first adapter, this one will not let you change the backgrounds of some games that have them pre-built in. The most notable difference is the addition of a Game Boy Link Cable slot on the right side of the cartridge. In Pokémon in particular, this gave players the ability to trade and fight with opponents.

One nice thing about the Super Game Boy 2 is that it is region-free, just like the Super Nintendo console itself, though you will have to either modify your Super Nintendo to allow it to fit in the slot or just remove the top housing. This is also true of the games made for Game Boy; they are not region locked like many of Nintendo's other products. This will allow you to import games and play them directly on either of the Super Game Boys.

The concept of the Super Game Boy would go on in later consoles to inspire such devices as the Game Boy Advance Player add-on for the Nintendo Game Cube before giving way to the digital era. It was truly a device of its time that many people enjoyed. Nintendo knew how to make their fans happy—who doesn't like having access to two different consoles on one machine? It is a practice they further utilized with the Virtual Console, illustrating how vital video game history is to the future of its successes.

A DEEPER MEANING FOR SUPER METROID

By Ken Horowitz

I am a Sega guy. Since the day my father bought me a Master System in December 1986, I have bled blue. I did own an Atari and ColecoVision before that, but my heart was captured that Christmas by Sega. During this period, there was just something about its games that felt different from the rest, both aesthetically and in design, and that attracted me more than other consoles. A lot of that had to do with the company's arcade heritage. At the genetic level Sega was something wonderfully different. It seemingly made a game for every conceivable style, filling every niche one could imagine. I thought there was nothing else that could ever impact me as much as Sega games had. Then I played *Metroid*.

I admit I arrived a bit late to the party, likely from being so entrenched in Sega-land. I did not get a chance to try *Metroid* until around 1988. A friend swapped his NES with me for a few months, and without my Master System under the TV, I was finally able to dedicate myself to catching up on all the Nintendo games I had never seen or only played in passing at friends' houses. Somehow, among the *Super Mario Bros.* sequels and both *Legend of Zelda* games, *Metroid* had slipped past me.

The only place near my country home that even rented video games was a mom-and-pop convenience store, and it was a frequent haunt of mine in high school. I rented *Metroid* that summer and fell in love with it. It was long, hard as nails, and completely confusing to my young mind (I didn't have *Nintendo Power*), but running around aimlessly had never been so much fun. There was nothing like it on the Master System—*Zillion* came close but wasn't as deep—and I was enthralled. I must have rented it a dozen times.

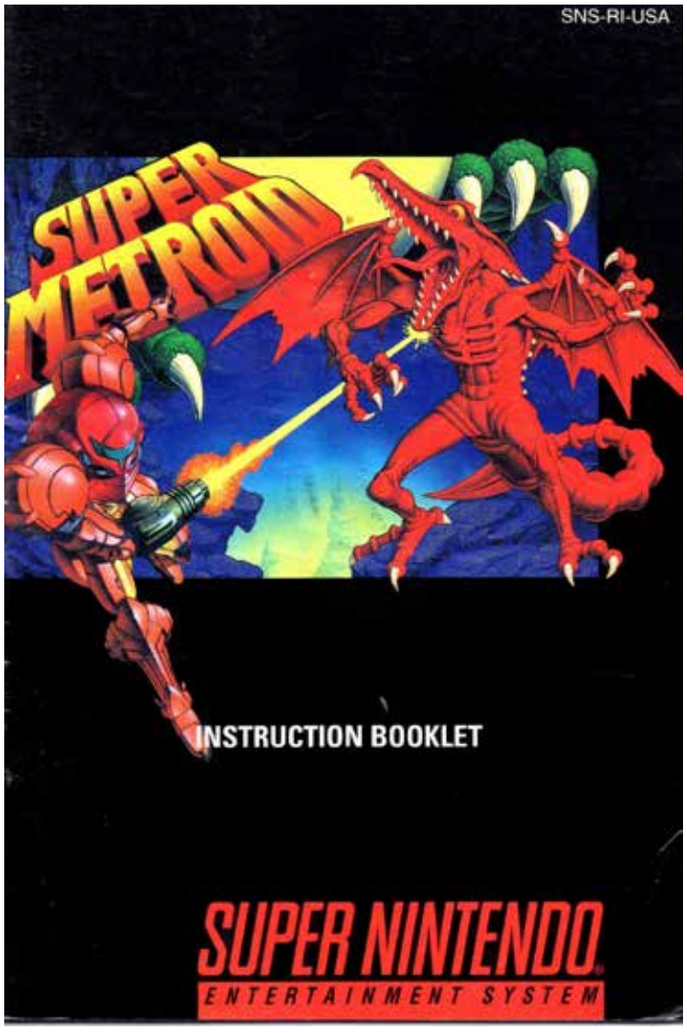
A few years later, I bought a SNES shortly after it launched in hopes that Nintendo would revisit Samus Aran's adventures. It took a few years, but the announcement was finally made, and I was elated to hear that a sequel was finally coming. My enthusiasm was well-rewarded, as *Super Metroid* turned out to be leagues above the original in every regard.

It is hard to say what made *Super Metroid* so appealing to me, more so than any other SNES game. Perhaps it was the much-improved presentation that showed off the great visual and sound capabilities of the SNES. Maybe it was how well the game utilized the SNES controller, making gameplay so much more intuitive than the first *Metroid*. It could also have been the wonderful level design that beckoned players to explore farther and invoked a sense of dreaded anticipation at what may lie ahead while simultaneously creating almost palpable tension. So much went right with this game that when I was asked why I enjoyed it so much, I would simplify my answer to avoid rambling.

I think what has made *Super Metroid* so enduring in my mind is a complex mixture of all the aforementioned elements. Together they created a video game environment like few others have, one that pulled players in with an eerie sense of immersion. No other game was able to replicate that feeling for me until 2009's *Demon's Souls*. Wandering around dark corridors, searching for new and better equipment while always wondering what lurks around every corner—it was enough to make the controller shake in one's hands.

Unlike From Software's hit adventure, though, *Super Metroid* accomplished this without the benefits of realistic 3D visuals, an orchestrated soundtrack, or voice acting. It relied on its design to be its strength, to make players forget that they were playing a 16-bit cartridge game and instead believe that they were *actually exploring an alien world*. It was not an easy feat by any means.

Super Metroid's success in creating a sense of exploration was not just the product of the improved power of Nintendo's new console. That alone would not be enough. *Super Mario World,* for instance, had players wandering a huge map to unlock new levels and then re-entering them several times to open alternate routes and other goodies, but the experience wasn't on the same level. The ambiance in *Super Mario World* was a stark contrast to *Super Metroid's*. Mario romped through a colorful and happy world filled with conveniently located items, while Samus wandered in silent darkness and had to find help on her own. Shortly before *Super Metroid's* 1994 release its director, Yoshio Sakamoto, described why his creation was so dissimilar to other action games of the time: "*Super Metroid* isn't a harder game, but it's a deeper, more involved game with a more dramatic overtone."



The last part of Sakamoto's description is the most telling. There is definitely a more "dramatic overtone" in Samus' 16-bit outing, one that carried over from the original game. That is not surprising, considering that the original *Metroid's* designer, Hirofumi Matsuoka, and the designers of its Game Boy sequel, Hiroyuki Kimura and Tomoyoshi Yamane, were involved in developing *Super Metroid.* The NES original was built around a theme of isolation, and that carried over to the handheld game, and then the SNES entry. *Super Metroid* managed to convey it best, and the added horsepower of Nintendo's 16-bit console increased that sense of loneliness ten-fold.

Looking back now, it doesn't surprise me that I never saw Sakamoto's vision when playing the first *Metroid*. I did recognize the solitariness of the main character, but I chalked it up to her simply being just that: the game's star. It never occurred to me that her aloneness could be a major component of the overarching theme of the Metroid franchise. It wasn't until I played *Super Metroid* that I understood just what Sakamoto was referring to. When I finally did see it, it made me view the series in an entirely different light. My conception of the first game was greatly heightened, and I now view it as perhaps the superlative action/platformer on the NES. Additionally, *Super Metroid* took on new meaning, beyond that of merely an amazing action game. I now saw the beauty in its design and the message it was trying to communicate.

I mentioned earlier that *Super Metroid* cast a sense of immersion that I did not feel again until I played *Demon's Souls*. While both do share the same "lone hero" dynamic and the possibility of dying alone in some alien land, it was that sense of isolation that bonded them to me. Isolation can be a horrible thing. The thought of being cut off from interaction with others is traumatic. Most people do not want to die alone, and even fewer would be willing to risk such a fate to save strangers. Samus takes on that risk willingly—a direct contrast to her bounty hunter image (and more in tune with her Chozo origins)—and players experience her trepidation throughout the game. *Super Metroid* was the first video game to make me feel truly isolated. The farther I roamed into the wild environments of Zebes, the farther away I was from safety, and the greater risk there was for catastrophic failure.

Restarting from a checkpoint or save point after dying at the hands of a boss or bottomless pit is standard fare for video games, but this was different. So many locations discovered, new passages to new areas—all gone now. Returning to them, with the thought of failure still fresh, could be emotionally exhausting. *Super Metroid* didn't just challenge the player's skills with a control pad, it also tested their mental and emotional fortitude. How someone played *Super Metroid* provided a glimpse into how they handled adversity, and the game now stands for me as a digital metaphor for resilience. That was what made me power through *Demon's Souls* and its sequels, and Sakamoto's masterpiece was one of my earliest life examples of success through resilience. It may seem a bit hackneyed now, but for a twenty-one-year-old college student struggling with the realities and responsibilities of adulthood, it was a cathartic experience.

This pivotal awakening is what *Super Metroid* represents for me. It is why I consider it my favorite SNES game and one of my top five titles of all time. As someone who grew up loving Sega, none of the games made by my beloved company nor its licensees ever affected me in this particular way. In my eyes, *Super Metroid* stands as an engaging and provoking work of art that exceeds its technical boundaries to speak to the soul. Many gamers likely have one title that changed them as people. Mine came from a most unlikely source, during the height of the console wars.

THE SUPER SCOPE 6 AND NINTENDO'S ROMANCE WITH GAMES AND GUNS

By Michael Thomasson

Who needs a LOUSY PISTOL when you can have a BAZOOKA?

Video game light guns have been around since Ralph Baer first modified a plastic pistol from Kmart for use with the famous Brown Box in 1967. It was later released as the Light Rifle for Magnavox's Odyssey for use with the *Shooting Gallery* game card released in 1972. The long barrel felt good pressed against the hip, and packing heat was never so much fun in the world of video games until the "Big N" launched the shoulder-mounted behemoth that was the Super Scope.

But long before the Super Scope Nintendo dabbled in other niche businesses. Many fans are aware that Nintendo's humble beginnings started with Hanafuda playing cards, but you may be surprised to learn that the company also tried its hand at the taxi business, selling grocery items such as ramen and instant rice, and even renting rooms by the hour at love hotels! It was within the Japanese toy industry that the firm first planted the seeds that would later come to fruition, making Nintendo a multinational video game company. In an age when guns were not so despised, it was the toy of choice that the company routinely revisited. Nintendo had a long history with gaming and guns.

In the early'70s, light-sensitive electronics known as solar cells hit the market. Nintendo published a series of light-beam games under the moniker of "Kôsenjû SP" (1971). The guns emitted a quick flash of light when activated, and targets hit by the beam would react in a fitting manner. For instance, a lion would roar, a roulette wheel would spin, or a bottle would break into pieces. Various versions were produced, including a pistol and a "pump action" rifle. The franchise thrived for more than half a decade.

Of particular interest was Nintendo's *Koya no Gunman* (1972), referred to as the *Wild Gunman* game. In this mechanical tabletop game set in the Nevada desert, players fire metal ball bearings (representing the bullets) past two plastic cacti in an attempt to knock over the opponent.

You might be thinking, "Wait, wasn't *Wild Gunman* an NES game for use with the Zapper light gun in the mid-'80s?" If that's the case, you would be right. You might also be surprised to learn that *Wild Gunman* was released more than ten years earlier in 1974, as a full-motion video (FMV) image projection game that was displayed on a massive three-foot by forty-inch screen using sixteen millimeter film. Armed with a real-world optical gun, the player would draw the firearm from the holster and try to shoot the opposing gunman before being shot by the on-screen gunslinger. The correct time to draw the gun was signaled to the player by the flashing of the enemy's eyes, a technique repeated in the NES video game adaptation of the title.

An interesting anecdote about the original *Wild Gunman* projection game is that it was also adapted into another title, *Fascination*, which was aimed at a more adult audience—the cowboys were replaced by young attractive Swedish women. The objective of *Fascination* was to disrobe the ladies by firing the gun strategically at their evening dresses until they were completely naked.

Also released by Nintendo in 1974 was the Shotracer. This toy combined a twenty-one-inch gun with vehicles that fit inside the bullet chamber to create a firearm that launched cars as ammunition out of the rifle barrel. It is unknown how many Japanese cats were terrorized with this toy!

In 1976, the last two models of the Nintendo Kousenjuu series were issued. Released as the *Custom Gunman* and *Custom Lion*, the games featured three-dimensional characters collapsing in a dramatic fashion when shot, almost as if they were actors on a stage.

That same year *Kôsenjû Duck Hunt*, which translates to "Light Ray Gun Duck Hunt," was released. *Duck Hunt* was an electromechanical toy designed by Gunpei Yokios's research and development team. The toy was packaged with a projector that beamed an image of an animated flapping duck in flight, as well as a twenty-four-inch black barreled, brown plastic shotgun with which to blast it.

Of course, when the plastic Zapper light gun debuted alongside the Nintendo Entertainment System in the US in 1985, *Duck Hunt* became a household name beside Mario. More than a dozen other light gun games followed.

When the SNES replaced the NES everything had to be "SUPER!" So in 1992, when Nintendo released its light gun, it had to be *big*! Almost two feet in length, and weighing in at almost two pounds, the Super Scope bazooka made you feel like the super soldier Rambo when you pointed it at the screen!

The Super Scope was easy to set up. First you would plug the receiver into the second controller slot and place it above your television. After popping six AA batteries into the bazooka itself you would be ready to go . . . but you'd be lucky to get four hours of gameplay from the thing before the batteries were completely drained. That was okay, as the oversized gun was not very ergonomic nor comfortable. But you would suffer through pain, as the games were so good!

Stacked with a front hand grip, shoulder pad, and a small reticule to aim, the Super Scope pretended to be more than your everyday light gun. In the end it was a good facsimile of the arcade experience at home. While it was kind of dreary looking, being molded in only a few shades of grey, it beat the pastel colored alternative packed with *Lethal Enforcers* (1994) known as the Justifier. Who really wanted a pink gun, anyway?

Though big in stature, the Super Scope was not a big hit at retail, selling only a million-and-a-half units. While the light gun games on the SNES never reached the popularity of games such as *Duck Hunt* or *Hogan's Alley* on the NES, the Super Scope held its own against the lame "me too" Menacer, its more direct competitor released by Sega for use with the Genesis.

Fewer than a dozen games took full advantage of the Super Scope: *Super Scope 6*, *Battle Clash* (a.k.a. *Space Bazooka*), *Bazooka Blitzkrieg* (a.k.a. *Destructive*), *Metal Combat: Falcon's Revenge*, *Operation Thunderbolt*, *Revolution X*, *T2: The Arcade Game*, *Tin Star*, *Yoshi's Safari* (a.k.a. *Yoshi's Road Hunting*), and *X-Zone*.

Other Super Scope Appearances

The Super Scope suffered from the traditional accessory conundrum. Companies shied away from developing games for the add-on because there were so few patrons, while consumers snubbed the product because there were not many compatible games. Since the Super Scope had such a small user base, only two companies chose to add optional modes that took advantage of Nintendo's bazooka.

Lamborghini American Challenge, released by Titus, was a traditional racing title . . . until player two picked up the bazooka and took pop shots at the racer's rivals.

Hi Tech Impressions' *The Hunt for Red October* was a video game adaptation of Tom Clancy's debut novel. The release of the game coincided with Paramount Pictures' film. Bonus levels of the game utilized the Super Scope.

The Hunt for Red October was not the only theatrical tie-in for the Super Nintendo light gun. The Super Scope was used as a prop in Buena Vista's live-action movie, *Super Mario Bros.* (1993). The Devo Gun—short for Devolution Gun—was a real-world Super Scope repainted with metallic paint. It was also the weapon of choice for President Koopa, played by Dennis Hopper.

The Super Scope even made an appearance during the infamous 1993 Congressional hearing on violence in video games. Shortly after Howard Lincoln spoke about how wholesome Nintendo's products were compared to Sega's product line, Bill White of Sega of America pulled out the Super Scope, prompting Senator Joe Lieberman to state that Nintendo's bazooka did indeed look like an assault weapon.

Following the hearings Nintendo shied away from light guns, with no such devices being released for their next two consoles (the Nintendo 64 and the GameCube). In fact, Nintendo did not release another gun peripheral until 2007, when *Link's Crossbow Training* (2007) dropped on the Wii. Despite the term "crossbow" in the title, Nintendo did not fool anyone.

The Super Scope made a cameo in the Game Boy Advance title *Mario & Luigi: Superstar Saga*. A character encountered in Bowser's Castle during the game is an antagonist by the name of Sniper Bill. He is actually a projectile bullet himself. Ironically, Bill wields a Super Scope that fires ammunition—miniature versions of himself.

The Super Scope's legacy has continued in several Smash Bros. titles for the GameCube, Wii, Wii U, and Nintendo 3DS. Not only is it a functional in-game weapon, it is also a trophy.

Only time will reveal when Nintendo's favorite bazooka will fire again!

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Rusel DeMaria played *Spacewar!* in 1967. After this experience, he wanted more from this new medium, which he got later with *Pong*, Atari, ColecoVision, Intellivision, and the Bally Astrocade. Rusel then discovered PC games and wrote for *A+ Magazine*, *PC Week*, *Byte*, and *Macazine*. Rusel wrote a book about shareware in the mid-1980s, and by 1990, he was senior editor for *PC Magazine* and a contributing editor on *GamePro*. Rusel founded the Secret of the Games strategy guide division for Prima Publishing, and he wrote *High Score Expanded* and *Game of X*. He's also a game designer and consultant, including as the narrative lead on the space combat simulator, *Starfighter Inc.*

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Kieren Hawken has been writing about video games for more than 10 years for many different publications, but he's best known for his work on *Retro Gamer* magazine. Other published works include numerous digital books, most notably his popular *A-Z* series. Kieren was a contributing author on *Let's Go Dizzy: The Story of the Oliver Twins* and *The Story of the Commodore Amiga in Pixels*. In addition, he appeared on the prime time UK technology show *Sky News Swipe*, as well as numerous podcasts. Check out his YouTube channel, The Laird's Lair.

Erin Hawley is a writer, editor, and digital content producer living in New Jersey. She started playing games on the Atari 2600 and Commodore 64, and now spends her extra time streaming PC games on Twitch. Erin's blog, The Geeky Gimp, focuses on disability representation and accessibility in nerdy media. You can find her work at geekygimp.com, and follow her on Twitter @geekygimp.

Patrick Hickey Jr. is an award-winning author, journalist, and educator. He is the editor-in-chief and founder of ReviewFix.com, and is the assistant director of the journalism program at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn, New York. Over the past 14 years his video game writing has appeared on a plethora of sites, including Complex, NBC, and Examiner. His work has also been featured in national ad campaigns by Nintendo, Disney, and EA Sports. Patrick is the author of *The Minds Behind the Games: Interviews With Cult and Classic Video Game Developers*.

Mike Hodson has been gaming since age two, when his father put an Atari 2600 joystick in his hands and powered up *Jungle Hunt*. Years later, his dad brought home the new Super Nintendo Entertainment System. Mike was hooked and the rest was history! He has been playing video games his whole life, but started seriously collecting in 2013. His first big find was the ultra-rare LifeFitness 9XS Exertainment bike for the SNES. From there, "theirontoupee," as he's known on NintendoAge.com, began his journey of collecting history, knowledge, and artifacts of the wonder that is the Exertainment line of products and peripherals.

Zoe K. Howard, author of *November's End*, is a freelance writer and accomplished video game critic. Zoe has been an avid gamer since the early '80s, immersing herself in both the culture and community of gaming. In 2012, Zoe and her partner Wanda Calamia began the YouTube show The Retro Gamer Girls. The duo quickly became advocates for equality and supported anti-bullying campaigns amongst gamers. In 2014, Zoe and Wanda were awarded with a Twin Galaxies Video Game Trading Card, representing women in gaming. Zoe is the creator and founder of Retro is Life: www.retroislife.com.

Kurt Kalata has been writing about video games on the internet for more than 20 years. In addition to founding retro game website Hardcore Gaming 101 in 2003, he previously started fan sites The Castlevania Dungeon and The Contra HQ. He also contributed to several other websites, including 1up, Gamasutra, and Siliconera. He has edited and published more than a dozen books through the HG101 website, including *The Guide to Classic Graphic Adventures* and *The 200 Best Video Games of All Time*.

Sam Kennedy, a twenty-year video game industry veteran, launched Gaming-Age.com in the mid-1990s. He went on to write for such publications as *GameFan*, GameSpot, *EGM*, and the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*. In 2003, he launched 1UP.com and oversaw the site through its eventual acquisition by IGN in 2011. Most recently, he marketed such franchises as *Call of Duty* and *Destiny* for Activision, then went on to co-found the independent game studio, Tigertron.

Chun Wah Kong has designed games for Software Creations, Psygnosis, Sony Computer Entertainment, and Skoobie Games.

Russ Kumro is an indie game programmer for a diverse array of platforms, ranging from iOS and Android to retro development for ColecoVision (titles include *Side Trak* and *Rip Cord*). Russ worked with CollectorVision as the lead programmer of the action title *Sydney Hunter and the Curse of the Mayan* for PC, Mac, and current-generation consoles. You can reach Russ on Facebook via the CollectorVision page, and you can check out his latest current-gen and ColecoVision releases at www.CollectorVision.com.

Anthony J. La Gambina is a lifelong gamer and collector. While growing up in the Midwest, he spent a great deal of time in the arcade of Lakeside Bowl in Roselle, Illinois. He began collecting with the NES and carries this passion through to today's modern consoles, as well as buying and repairing arcade machines and EM pinball machines. Anthony also practices residential architecture and is a Facebook administrator for the video game collection application GameEye, in addition to beta testing the app and helping to develop new features.

Ben "Random Dave" Lancaster has always been a gamer, but in 2006, was fortunate enough to start working at a development studio, performing various tasks on titles for Sega, Konami, Codemasters, EA, Microsoft, and Sony, alongside a number of developers who had been working together during the Super Nintendo's heyday. Ben later moved into the world of engineering simulation, which has afforded him much more free time to create silly homebrew games and other projects in conjunction with the RetroGaming Roundup podcast.

Jeff Lawhead is a published author, indie game composer, and Ocremixer under the name 12 Followers/Meteo Xavier. Check out his websites: www.jslawhead.com and www.meteoxavier.com.

John Lester is a YouTube content creator for the Gamester81 series, which he's been doing since 2008. He is also co-owner and head of marketing for CollectorVision Games. CollectorVision produces new games for classic consoles, and has also released a game called *Sydney Hunter and the Curse of the Mayan* for modern platforms. In 2015, John co-created the Game On Expo event.

Kelsey Lewin is a YouTube content creator covering weird and obscure games, consoles, and accessories. She co-owns Pink Gorilla Games, a retro and import video game store in Seattle, Washington. In her spare time she works as a volunteer for the Video Game History Foundation.

Bill Loguidice is the author of eight technology books and was a writer and producer of *Gameplay: The Story of the Videogame Revolution*, a feature film documentary on the history of video games. He runs the popular website Armchair Arcade, and continues to write for a variety of major publications. Bill owns and maintains more than 500 different video game and computer systems from the 1970s to the present day, which helps inform his writing.

Alex McCumbers hails from the mountains of West Virginia. Always in pursuit of video game academia, and fighting against all odds to be a writer, he sharpens his mind and skills with daily practice. Find him on Forever Classic (YouTube, Twitch, podcast), Marooners' Rock (maroonersrock.com), and Giga Geek Magazine (www.gigageekmagazine.com).

Stephanie Mckeon is the host of the Our Brooklyn Bytes podcast and a former employee of Dial Electronics in Brooklyn, New York.

Ryan McLelland is a reviewer for 2G1 Reviews, previously working for entertainment sites such as Newsarma, Ain't It Cool News, and Latino Review. Ryan has written several comic books and can be found in films like *The King of Arcades* and *ThanksKilling 3*, for which he somehow was *not* nominated for an Academy Award. Ryan loves retro games and can be found at home, still trying to beat *EarthBound*.

Delf Meek has been gaming since he begged his parents to buy him an Atari 2600 in 1981, when he was just five years old. Since then, he has evolved through every gaming system up to modern consoles, but his true love is for the classics. An exhibitor at various gaming conventions in Texas and Oklahoma, Delf enjoys collecting and restoring old video game consoles and arcade machines.

Kale Menges has been an avid gamer all his life, starting with the Atari 2600 nearly four decades ago. According to legend, in the early 1980s, when he was just an infant, his mother would prop him up in the arcade cabinet as she played *Pac-Man* while waiting for clothes to dry at the laundromat, the radiation from the CRT warping his imagination and setting his destiny in motion. An artist and graphic designer, Kale has spent the last decade working as a game developer, contributing to a myriad of titles across an array of platforms.

Jason Micciche is an award-winning fiction writer and journalist whose work has appeared in numerous publications and has been featured at San Diego Comic Con. He is currently the owner and editor-in-chief at BrutalGamer.com and has contributed to publications as a video game, toy, and comic book expert. Jason lives in New York with his family and twin Alaskan Malamutes.

John Jackson Miller is a *New York Times* bestselling author. His Star Wars novels include *Star Wars: A New Dawn*, *Kenobi*, *Knight Errant*, and *Lost Tribe of the Sith*. He also wrote the *Knights of the Old Republic* comics, available from Marvel as *Star Wars Legends: The Old Republic*. For *Star Trek*'s 50th anniversary, he wrote the monthly *Star Trek* novel trilogy *Prey*. His most recent *Star Wars* work appears in *Star Wars: From a Certain Point of View*, *Star Wars: Canto Bight*, and IDW's *Star Wars Adventures* comics. He's written about games for the All Game Guide and as editor of Scrye magazine, and he's written comics and prose for *Halo*, Iron Man, *The Simpsons*, Conan, *Planet of the Apes*, and *Mass Effect*. Miller writes about comics history on his Comichron website, www.comichron.com. His fiction website is www.farawaypress.com.

Matt Miller is a lifelong gamer and multiple video game world record holder, both as a solo player and as one-half of the co-op gaming duo, Team Mayh3m. He has had records published in five books in the *Guinness World Records Gamer's Edition* series. Matt has been interviewed in a variety of outlets, including Obsolete Gamer, Twin Galaxies, Extended Play Arcade, The Walter Day Collection, and The Retro Junkies Winging It podcast. He also appears in the acclaimed 2015 documentary, *Nintendo Quest*, as well as its companion series, the *Nintendo Quest Power Tour*.

Dave Murray, known as davefmurray, is the director of Tecmo Madison, the Tecmo Super Bowl World Championships. He is also a long-time administrator of TecmoBowl.org, the definitive *Tecmo Bowl* fan site. His work can be found at TecmoMadison.com and Twitter (@davefmurray).

Michael Nestick is a former quality assurance intern for Gearbox Software. He now tests games for various indie developers. His credits include such titles as *Borderlands 2* and *The Radioactive Chicken Heads: Badd Bunny Breakout*.

Arda Ocal is a broadcaster with ESPN, MSG Networks, and WWE on his resume. Arda's also been that weather guy in the massive blistering snow storm that resents the anchor in studio saying "It sure looks cold!" after he wraps. A geek at heart, Arda loves all things video games, comics, and nerd culture.

Joshua L. Olson, a.k.a. The Game Grinder on YouTube, is a lifelong video game player and collector. Beginning with retro consoles like the Atari 2600 and NES, through modern systems including PC gaming, video games have remained a primary hobby. Joshua now shares this passion via online videos featuring reviews, game pickups, topic discussions, and unboxings. Joshua also co-hosts the bi-weekly The Game Tenants Podcast.

Patrick Scott Patterson is a video game advocate, historian, and preservationist. Gaming since 1981, Patterson works full-time in his efforts to ensure that the legacy of the industry and culture are not lost to time. Check out his work at www.patrickscottpatterson.com.

David Paul is a documentary film and television producer based in Los Angeles, and an avid retro game player.

Eric "8-Bit Eric" Perez is a professional wrestler and popular retro gaming YouTuber. You can find his channel at finalbosses.com.

Matt Raithel has, within the past decade, held a production role in over 50 video games ranging from the iPhone to the Wii U, all while helping grow three different game development studios. He currently owns and leads the team at Graphite Lab, a video game development studio that was listed as "One to Watch" by *Game Informer* magazine in 2015. Matt is also on staff at

Maryville University in St. Louis as an instructor of game design, where he teaches classes focusing on game design principles, as well as the history of game design.

Kris Randazzo started gaming on an Atari 2600 Jr. back when he was a wee lad, and he has been fascinated by all things video game ever since. He's worked at FuncoLand, Toys "R" Us, Game Crazy, GameStop, and even Nintendo for a brief period. He is currently editor-in-chief of Geekade.com, co-host of the Stone Age Gamer Podcast, host of the WaveBack Video Game Music Podcast, writer of the Stone Age Gamer blog, a regular contributor to *Nintendo Force Magazine*, and the proud owner of a sizeable (and remarkably heavy) video game collection.

Benjamin Reeves is a writer, journalist, beer maker, and geek sponge. He is currently a senior editor for *Game Informer* magazine. His passions include video games, comic books, science-fiction (or fact), and nearly every other thing that got you picked on in high school. Check out his novel, *Kill Screen*, available via www.amazon.com and www.barnesandnoble.com.

John Riggs grew from being completely unknown in the gaming industry to being moderately obscure. He has been a featured guest on the Metal Jesus Rocks YouTube channel and hosts his own humble channel (RIGG'd Games), showing tutorials on how to fix and save your old video games. Riggs loves the new games, but you can still find him digging through boxes of Famicom carts or filing through PC Engine CD games at various video game conventions. He is a sucker for the classics.

Dan Ryan is a co-host of the Stone Age Gamer podcast and a writer and podcaster for Geekade.

Scott Schreiber is an arcade collector and a co-host of the RetroGaming Roundup podcast.

Greg Sewart is the former previews and reviews editor of *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, as well as a contributor to such outlets as G4TV, *Official US PlayStation Magazine*, Games Radar, and more. He later moved into development, working on titles like *Robotech: Invasion*, the *Madden* NFL series, and *Elite: Dangerous*. He is currently the head of game development at The REDspace. Greg co-founded the Player One Podcast with fellow *EGM* alumni, Chris Johnston. His love of retro games also led to the creation of the YouTube series Generation 16, which examines the games and history surrounding Sega's Mega Drive/Genesis console. Check out his work at www.playeronepodcast.com and www.generation-16.com.

Barry Shank, who began gaming on the Atari 2600, is the founder of GHG (Gamers Helping Gamers) on Facebook. He started buying games for the Atari 2600 from the flea market in the '80s with his dad, who refused to spend more than $3 per game. From there, he moved on to the Genesis and now has a game room that contains every console since. His current passion is working with his group to help people find the games they want at reasonable prices.

Holt Slack discovered his love of video games via a friend's home *Pong* console in 1975. Soon after, other friends introduced the Odyssey, Atari, and Apple II computer before Holt finally got his own Atari 2600 for Christmas in 1979. He began reading magazines like *Electronic Games* and *Creative Computing* and video game tip books in the school library. He remains an avid collector and exhibits at regional gaming conventions like the Let's Play Gaming Expo in Dallas and the late, great Oklahoma Video Game Expo in Tulsa. Holt's greatest gaming achievement is getting a letter to the editor published in the June 1983 issue of *Electronic Fun with Computers & Games* magazine—look it up!

Andy Slaven and his friends, Michael Collins and Luke Barnes, founded *Video Game Bible* in 2000, in an effort to create the first comprehensive video game guide for consoles released from 1985 through the guide's eventual publication in 2002. Andy's work has been featured in *Game Informer*, *Tips & Tricks*, the All Game Guide, and *Toy World Magazine*.

Stephen Smith is a video game enthusiast who has been a staff writer for Advanced Media Network and Kombo.com. He contributed to *Video Game Collector* magazine and worked with Eggroll Games, which specializes in apps for children. Stephen also founded Burrito Game Company and is the programmer of *Road Duel*, a homebrew game for the Atari 2600.

Eric St-Cyr is the host of noirmagnetique.com, where he documents the history of technology in the province of Quebec (Canada), such as the broadcast of Apple II games played live via touch-tone phones on cable TV in the 1980s.

Shane Stein wrote film, music, and video game reviews for his college newspaper, *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, while attending the University of Pennsylvania from 1996–2000. He is an avid retro gamer, with his favorite all-time games being *Mike Tyson's Punch-Out!!*, *Street Fighter II*, and *NBA Jam*. Some of his greatest fanboy moments include building his own Mega Man costume, buying his wife a foot massager because it resembled *Super Mario 3*'s Kuribo's Shoe, and rocking his kids to sleep as infants by humming them video game theme songs. Shane works as a financial advisor and lives in Dallas with his wife Tracey and their three daughters.

Rob Strangman is the author of *Memoirs of a Virtual Caveman*, a book about his experiences growing up during the "golden age" of gaming. He is a regular contributor to both *Little Player* magazine and the *Digital Press* fanzine. Rob first made a name for himself in the online classic gaming community in 1998, with his website The OPCFG, then later went on to found the *Splatterhouse* online fan site, West Mansion: The Splatterhouse Homepage. Due to his work on West Mansion, Rob was asked to be a consultant on gameplay and authenticity for the 2010 video game, *Splatterhouse* (PlayStation 3, Xbox 360).

Michael Suitt has been passionate about video games since he first started going to the arcades in 1978, at the tender age of eight. His passion was furthered when he got his first console, a Mattel Intellivision, in 1980. As he grew up he branched out into board games, *Dungeons & Dragons*, and more consoles. Over the years he has written articles and reviews for All Platform Gaming, worked the local flea market circuit, and started his own company, The Game Czar, with his wife Jennifer. They are exhibitors on the Texas convention circuit, where you will find them at such shows as Retropalooza and the Houston Arcade Expo.

Darren Sulfridge, a gamer since the *Pong* days, has been an avid collector of console, computer, and arcade games for over twenty years. He is also one of the founders of the Let's Play Gaming Expo, an annual video game celebration that takes place in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

John Szczepaniak has been a journalist for over 16 years and has interviewed more than 180 people. He is also a novelist and copy editor. His trilogy of interview books, *The Untold History of Japanese Game Developers*, totals nearly a million words detailing previously undocumented secrets about your favorite Japanese games, direct from the developers themselves. He's written for Gamasutra, *Game Developer Magazine*, *Retro Gamer*, *GamesTM*, *Official PlayStation Magazine*, The Escapist, and Hardcore Gaming 101, plus over a dozen other publications and websites.

Sarah Szefer is an English-to-French translator who worked as team lead on the French-Canadian adaptation of *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time* 3-D for the Nintendo 3DS, based on the European French Nintendo 64 translation.

Paul Tesi is a casual and competitive gamer from Seattle. He has won many tournaments and holds various Guinness World Record

gaming scores. He currently co-hosts the Seattle Retro Gaming Expo's annual Arcade Armageddon gaming tournament, which was the event that got him his start in competitive gaming back in 2013, when he first won. His favorite console is the Super Nintendo, and he's trying to complete the full NTSC library. Some of his favorite games include *Secret of Mana*, *Ninja Warriors*, *Tetris*, and the *Mega Man X* series.

Michael Thomasson is one of the most widely respected video game historians in the field today. He currently teaches college-level video game history, design, and graphics courses. For television, Michael conducted research for MTV's video game-related program *Video MODS*. In print, he authored *Downright Bizarre Games* and has contributed to nearly a dozen textbooks. Michael's historical columns have been distributed in newspapers and magazines worldwide. He has written business plans for several vendors and managed a dozen game-related retail stores spanning three decades. Michael consults for multiple video game and computer museums, and has worked on nearly 100 game titles on Atari, Coleco, Sega, and other console platforms. In 2014, the *Guinness Book of World Records* declared that Thomasson had the "Largest Video Game Collection" in the world. His businesses sponsor gaming tradeshows and expos across the US and Canada. Visit www.gooddealgames.com.

Alex Thompson is a self-proclaimed "nerd of all trades." He loves comic books and has a passion for video games that goes back to when he played the NES at his aunt's house when he was only three years old. While most twenty-somethings have a passion for the newer disc-based games and modern downloads, Alex still loves the feeling of popping a cartridge into his Nintendo 64 for some retro greatness. He currently works for PopNerdTV.com as chief content officer, and you can hear him talk about new video game releases on his YouTube show, Now Loading.

Thor Thorvaldson is one of those weirdos who turned his childhood obsession into a paying job, converting his love for *Pac-Man*, *Donkey Kong*, and *Dig Dug* into a semi-career creating art for *Nintendo Force Magazine*, *RETRO* magazine, *Little Player* magazine, and Hardcore Gaming 101. Creating artwork for their endeavors, he has also worked with Bryan Belcher's Mega Man-athon, David Craddock, and John Szczepaniak, along with numerous Nerdcore Hip-Hop musicians, including Random a.k.a. Mega Ran, Mikal kHill, DJ Cutman, Sulfur, and Tribe One. Thor loves the '80s, Pokémon, and pizza.

John Trenbeath, a former radio DJ, is the co-organizer of the Gaming4Guts charity gaming marathon and a co-host of the Bits & Pieces Show podcast. He is also a former Software Etc. and GameStop employee.

Juan Vaca was a game designer at Telltale Games and is an advocate for authentic representation in storytelling. He believes the player agency created through games is a powerful tool for empathy. His credits include: Telltale's *The Walking Dead* series, *Tales from the Borderlands*, *Batman*, *Minecraft: Story Mode*, *The Amazing Spider-Man: The Game*, and *Deadpool*. He is currently writing his memoirs from his time in the service as a Marine sniper, and he can often be found on his couch watching movies, playing games, or reading comics.

David Warhol is a thirty-five-year veteran game designer/programmer/producer. One of the original Mattel Intellivision "Blue Sky Rangers," David is also recognized for creating the soundtracks for dozens of video and computer games in the '80s before founding Realtime Associates, Inc., developer of more than 100 games to date. David remains active in game development and is currently using his early industry experience to pioneer new technical entertainment markets.

Charis McCoy Weiss married into the retro gaming world, where she has happily played Diddy to Brett's Donkey Kong for more than twenty-five years. A high school English and journalism teacher, she frequently has the privilege of reading Brett's articles before anyone else. While she is grateful for Brett's career and her own, she is most proud of their collaboration, raising two children, Ryan and Katie.

Ryan Weiss is the son of author Brett Weiss. He is a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, with a degree in history. While his teaching job, social life, and obsession with movies and the reality show *Survivor* limit him playing video games on a regular basis, his love for Mario and *Star Wars* keep him coming back.

Greg Wilcox has been gaming since 1972, collecting since the 1980s, and writing about games from 1998 to the present, with an eye on preservation. He loves imports and demos to a fault, but also has too many movies and PC games in his backlog. Greg's current location is fanboydestroy.com.

Jeffrey Wittenhagen is an avid retro video game author, collector, and gamer, and he is a member of the VGBS Gaming Podcast. Jeff has written and published several books, including *Hidden Treasures* and successful Kickstarter releases of *The Complete NES*, *The Complete SNES*, and *NES Oddities & the Homebrew Revolution*. Supplementing the books are *Video Game Compendiums* consisting of personal stories from contributors. Jeff is always working on tons of projects and puts as much passion behind them as he can.

Steve Woita's first job after graduating from college in Electrical Engineering was at Apple Computer. He worked on the Apple II, then on to R&D for Lisa, Apple III, Apple IIe, and the Apple 80 column card for the Apple II. He co-designed Sirius Software's JoyPort and later co-designed the MouseStick for the original Macintosh. Steve moved to Atari in 1982, and created *Quadrun*, *TAZ*, *Asterix*, and *Garfield* (unreleased). Steve, who is still designing games, has worked on numerous other titles, including *Super Sprint* (NES); *Sonic the Hedgehog 2*, *Sonic Spinball*, and *Kid Chameleon* (Genesis); *Army Men Sarge's Heroes* (PS1, 3DO); and *Gubble 1* and *Gubble 2* (PC, PS1, iOS). For more info check stevewoita.wordpress.com.

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